REPORT RESUMES

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THE AUTHOR EXAMINES LISTENING GROUP PROJECTS IN OVER 30 COUNTRIES SINCE THE 1920S. THE HISTORICAL STUDY AND THE REVIEW OF RESEARCH DEAL WITH PURPOSES AND OUTCOMES OF PROJECTS, CLIENTELE, BROADCASTS AND SUPPLEMENTAL PRINTED MATERIALS, METHODS OF GROUP ORGANIZATION, METHODS OF POST-BROADCAST DISCUSSIONS, GROUP LEADERSHIP, AND FEEDBACK. DIRECT AND RELATED RESEARCH IS EVALUATED IN TERMS OF THE CONCLUSION THAT SUCH GROUPS CAN SPREAD THE LEARNING OF FACTUAL MATERIAL, HELP DEVELOP DESIRED ATTITUDES, INCREASE INTEREST IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AFFECT MOTIVATION TOWARD GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL ACTION, AND CONTRIBUTE TO MORE DIRECT DEMOCRACY. OTHER RESEARCH FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT PROJECTS NEED A SUBSTANTIAL STAFF OF FIELD ORGANIZERS, AND THAT LISTENING GROUPS ATTRACT CLIENTELE OF LOWER ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT THAN THE TYPICAL PARTICIPANT IN ADULT EDUCATION. SPECIAL EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON EARLY EFFORTS OF THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION, AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR, CANADA'S NATIONAL FARM RADIO FORUM, AND THE MANY PROJECTS OF UNESCO IN UNDERDEVELOPED AREAS. (THIS DOCUMENT IS A REVISION AND ADAPTATION OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES.) THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ADULTS, 138 MOUNTFORT ST., BROOKLINE, MASS. 02146. (LY)

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LISTENING GROUPS

Mass Media In Adult Education

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at Boston University

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PREFACE

Not since 1941 when the Columbia University Press published Frank Ernest Hill's and W. E. Williams' volume, Radio's Listening Groups: The United States and Great Britain, have we had a comprehensive treatment of "the listening group" as an instrumentality for adult discussion and learning. The Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, by deciding to publish John Ohliger's study, makes a major contribution to bridging this gap in the literature of adult education. In the intervening years, viewing groups have been added to the category, and reports of programs in various parts of the country (e.g., San Bernardino, California and St. Louis, Missouri) describe how both radio and television have been used to increase public understanding of community problems.

As Dr. Ohliger indicates, there is a wide variety of techniques which have been attempted not only in the United States but in many other parts of the world as well. Perhaps the absence of a readily available source book on the subject is, in part, an explanation of why new projects are often developed with apparently little, if any, reference to lessons already learned from past experience. The mortality rate in listening group projects has been high, but the persistence of the form and the increasing availability of the media continue to stimulate new experiments. I am convinced that adult educators contemplating such experimentation can gain valuable insights and guidelines from this study.

The present volume is a revision and adaptation by Ohliger of his much longer doctoral dissertation. I should mention that some details, especially on British and other overseas efforts that are discussed in the original manuscript, are not included here. The main movements in the story are, however, all here.

It gives me great pleasure to commend this publication to CSLEA's "reading public" and to congratulate the author on a most useful study.

Paul H. Sheats
Dean
University of California Extension

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In the literature of adult education, when a group of adults meets together on a regular basis to discuss radio or television programs, the group is called a listening group. It is conducted usually under the leadership of a lay person and sometimes with the assistance of supplemental printed materials and with arrangements for two-way communication (feedback) between the listeners and the broadcasters.

Listening group projects have been organized in over thirty countries in the past forty-five years. These groups have also been called broadcast-based discussion groups, listening circles, listening posts, viewing groups, radio discussion groups, viewing posts, wireless discussion groups, wireless listening groups, radio study groups, listening-end discussion groups, wireless discussion circles, wireless study groups, listeners' study circles, radio forum groups, listeners' study groups, home based listener-discussion groups, radio study discussion groups, listeners-in circles, and viewing discussion groups. But whatever the name, the ingredients are the same: small groups and mass media.

Educational researchers credit the listening group approach with the ability to spread the learning of factual material efficiently on a mass basis, to promote the development of desired attitudes, to increase interest in various subject matter areas, and to affect motivation toward group and individual action. Most mass communication researchers agree that there is potentially great educational and persuasive power in the combination of broadcast followed by small group discussion supplemented by printed materials. Some political scientists and public figures believe that a listening group movement could be an important element in moving toward more direct democracy in an age of pervasive mass media.

In a recent speech, the vice chairman of UNESCO's International Committee on Adult Education called the listening group "the most significant method for the purposeful use of audio-visual media for adults." In 1954, Blakely, referring mainly to listening group projects, stated:

> This huge subject is perhaps the most important and promising frontier of adult education today. ~~It~~ is an attempt to combine the impact, flexibility, economy and range of the mass media, on the one hand, with the educative processes of personal participation (reading, reflection, the exchange of ideas and information, and the formulation and testing of conclusions), on the other hand. Vigorous experimentation is going on in this field.[1]

In Knowles' recent book on the adult education movement in the United States, he begins a section describing several listening group experiments with these words: "Without question the most promising development in the use of the mass media as an institutional form for the education of adults was the combining of several media together with group discussion into an integrated learning experience."[2]

Schramm calls the listening groups "uniquely effective [examples of] the uniquely powerful combination of mass media and related group discussion." He believes such groups are "potentially of great value in changing group-anchored attitudes and behavior."[3]

At various times listening group projects have been characterized by outside observers as a "Broadcast University," "the University of Equals," and "a kind of People's University on an immense scale." In the political education sphere, UNESCO says "The listening group seems to offer an altogether new approach to education and to democratic citizenship." Lord Beveridge believed the groups in England represented "a frontal attack on passivity." Denny called public affairs listening groups "the power plants of democracy." India's Minister of Agriculture believes that listening group projects "could be the nearest approach to direct democracy in the modern world." And Paul Sheats in a recent speech related proposals by Sidney Hertzberg of Current Magazine, James Reston of The New York Times, and Norman Cousins of The Saturday Review to his own vision of a federally financed and sponsored "system under which, for two hours on one evening each week, every citizen alert to his civic responsibilities might gather with friends and neighbors in face to face discussion groups to consider week by week the major issues faced by his President, his governor, and his mayor [in an experience which would] include the use of the mass media for the presentation of authoritative materials."[4]

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[1] Robert J. Blakely, "The Citizen and the Mass Media," in Nelson B. Henry (ed.), Mass Media and Education: 53rd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education—Part II (Chicago: NSSE, 1954), p. 283.

[2] Malcolm Knowles, The Adult Education Movement in the United States (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1962), p. 128.

[3] Wilbur Schramm, Mass Media and National Development (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 152-54, 263-64.

But listening group projects have not only been the subject of praise for their worth and acknowledgment of their significance. The sponsoring agency of one of the largest projects was said to view them as "unprofitable troublemakers." Grattan says that listening groups "have never really caught on, though isolated successes have been achieved." One commentator in School and Society called the listening group that "particular form of pathology habitual listeners to the radio disclose." And an editorial in a prominent newspaper called the sponsoring agency of one large listening group project an "educational octopus" which with its "adult educational ganglion [is] mobilizing the uplift legions . . . to create by mass suggestion a race of mental robots."[5]

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

In the latest edition of the Handbook of Adult Education, London lists fourteen program forms which he categorizes as familiar ones in adult education. The listening group is included among such forms as the conference, the panel, the workshop, the class, the seminar, and the training laboratory. But while the other forms have been the subject of a significant number of general works, no such general work has been published on the listening group as a program form.

One survey of groups, which approached the character of a general study, was published twenty-five years ago: Radio's Listening Groups—The United States and Great Britain, published in 1941 by Columbia University Press. The authors, Frank Ernest Hill and W. E. Williams, did not collaborate with each other. Hill, in a recent letter to this writer, stated that each author prepared a single monograph on a geographical basis and that there was no contact or correspondence between them. Each monograph reaches conclusions conflicting with the other. The whole work, however, contains a great deal of valuable data and suggestions.

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[4] Paul H. Sheats, "New Knowledge for What?" in Adult Leadership, 11 (January, 1963), p. 221.

[5] Quoted in H. L. Beales, "Editorial," Journal of Adult Education (London), 6 (April, 1933), pp. 127-28; The Listener (BBC), Feb. 22, 1933.

Brunner, in his Overview of Adult Education Research, notes the need for research in this area. A section on "Adult Education and Action Programs," in which two of the three activities mentioned are listening group projects, carries the conclusion that "this whole area greatly needs research." And later, in a section which praises a Canadian listening group project as "one of the most remarkably successful programs known to have relied upon the use of audio-visual devices," Brunner included, as one of several suggestions for future research, the suggestion that "research concerning the comparative effectiveness of audio-visual devices would contribute information of value to adult education."[6]

Educators agree that there is a definite place for a study which will draw together and examine the hundreds of explorations into the listening group. Eugene Johnson, the American adult educator who has had the most experience administering listening group projects through ten years of Fund for Adult Education financed experiments in California and Missouri, feels we should at least pull together what information is available about the use of listening or viewing groups.

Sometimes educational planners bypass the use of listening groups because they can find no up-to-date source of general information on them. Often plans for the organization of the groups proceed with little reference to lessons learned from previous projects. Time after time listening group activities have been begun and then quickly abandoned or cut back in scope. The literature is replete with studies in which the authors ask, "Why did this particular listening group project fail?" This study is designed to indicate to educators responsible for planning adult programs some of the values, limitations, requirements, and appropriate uses of the listening groups.

The study is based on interviews and correspondence with adult educators and broadcasters known for their experience with listening groups in Washington, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Ottawa, Toronto, Paris, and Jaipur (India), and on material on listening groups in over eight hundred books, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, official reports, descriptive case studies, research reports, scholarly journals, popular periodicals, and newspapers. Analysis of the material shows that eight elements of the listening group approach occur to some degree in most if not all projects. These are purposes and outcomes, clients, types of broadcasts, supplemental printed materials, methods of group organization, methods of post-broadcast discussions, group leadership arrangements, and feedback procedures. Using these common elements as reference points, this report traces the development of the listening group historically and reviews research related to it. It provides specific illustrations of some generalizations in the area which should be of value to adult educators contemplating the use of this program form.

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[6] Edmund deS. Brunner et al., An Overview of Adult Education Research (Chicago: Adult Education Association, 1959), pp. 137-39, 161-62.

The study traces the early development of the groups in Great Britain, indicating the wide variety of ways in which each element in the approach can be utilized and pointing to the need for a firm cooperative arrangement between broadcasters and adult educators. Since American groups owe much of their development to the earlier experience of the British, the report then explores early projects in the United States, giving particular attention to the variety of institutional sponsors and the significance of government support. Developing at about the same time as the United States groups were projects in a number of western European countries. These projects are included here briefly to illustrate the possibility that the listening group is a neutral program form that can be molded to satisfy vastly different educational and political goals.

As the Second World War was beginning, the groups in most of Europe and the United States were going under, while in Canada one of the most successful listening group projects yet devised was just starting to flourish. The report on the Canadian experience illustrates that a project of long duration can be developed if there is serious advance planning, suitable experimentation, and significant study of the previous history of listening groups and similar educational forms. The report then traces the powerful influence of some but not all elements of the Canadian approach on the many projects fostered by UNESCO. It goes on to examine activity in other countries including the United States in recent years since the war.

The study ends with a summary of the results of direct and related research.

Chapter II

PROJECTS BEFORE WORLD WAR II

GREAT BRITAIN

Although nobody knows the exact origin of the idea for listening groups, it is generally agreed that the idea received its first substantial flowering in Great Britain. The British Broadcasting Company (later the British Broadcasting Corporation) began transmitting in 1922, and its first serious involvement in educational broadcasting began in the fall of 1924 with a series of talks. Without any encouragement or suggestion from the BBC, a number of groups, especially in rural areas, decided to listen to and discuss the early series. Soon some of them made contact with the BBC and requested assistance. The BBC and a group of adult educators then studied the situation, approved the educational efforts of the BBC, and called for the organization and support of listening groups.[1] In the spring of 1927, the BBC scheduled the first series of broadcasts designed expressly for listening groups—"A Hundred Years of Working Class Progress."

Within the first three years, the listening groups organized through the efforts of the British Broadcasting Corporation and others grew from sixty to over one thousand. But such growth did not continue. The number of groups never reached more than two thousand before the BBC ended its support for the movement in 1947.

Factors Fostering Development

At least five factors were responsible for the fact that listening groups developed earlier in Great Britain than in other countries.

First, in the early days proportionately fewer individuals owned receiving sets in England than in the United States and some other countries. The annual license fee in Britain also slowed down set purchases. The greater set scarcity tended to encourage more communal listening arrangements.

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[1] BBC, New Ventures in Broadcasting: A Study in Adult Education (London: BBC, 1928), pp. 87-88.

Second, a pattern of starting all types of educational innovations through the organization of voluntary bodies on a local level with national encouragement had been developing in Britain since the eighteenth century.

Third, the principle of voluntary association had taken hold many years earlier in the field of adult education and had helped to create a strong and comparatively well institutionalized movement. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was already over twenty years old at the time of the first listening groups. The Local Education Authorities and a number of universities maintained significant programs of the liberal arts type. Thus an adult program such as the listening groups represented had many resources upon which to draw.

Fourth, the British Broadcasting Corporation was an organization well suited to experimentation with listening groups. Neither a government agency nor a private corporation, the BBC, this "monopoly in efficient hands," was unfettered by commercial considerations and unhindered by a government bureaucracy. The monopoly system permitted central planning of educational offerings and the quasi-governmental character of the corporation under the indirect control of the British Post Office added impetus to the drive of the broadcasters to serve broad social needs.

Fifth, in Great Britain perhaps more than in other countries, influential figures believed in the early days that radio would be a great power for good, that by its very nature broadcasting would have a benign effect. The motto of the BBC until 1935 was, "Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation."

Variety of Elements in the British Design

Purposes and Outcomes

During the twenty-year life of the movement in Great Britain (1927-1947), there was constant experiment with different combinations of almost every possible element in the listening group approach. No single stable pattern of elements ever emerged. Four different types of administrative machinery were utilized at different periods. The groups were organized with such varying purposes as encouraging further reading, stimulating enrollment in more formal adult education programs, providing an opportunity for acquiring a general background of knowledge, fostering community and political action, and promoting independence of thought on political issues.

Whether the groups succeeded significantly in encouraging reading or stimulating enrollment is subject to debate. Many librarians reported that circulation of books increased while the BBC recommended publications for the groups and declined when it ceased the practice. The evidence suggests, too, that some participants and, at times, even whole groups did move into more formal adult education classes. As for stimulating political and community action, a number of instances indicate that the listening groups did foster such activity. Williams, who was otherwise extremely critical of the values of the listening groups, made this statement about their political role:

> The savour of democratic life does not depend on large numbers of bookish people, but on a vast number of citizens ready to face arguments and facts not necessarily agreeable to them, and in making up their minds not on the basis of wide reading but on material presented to them.
>
> Issues are already complicated enough and are not likely to get any simpler in the near future. The democratic peoples of the world will never understand contemporary problems in any great detail. The mass is too overwhelming. The future of democracy depends on whether its leaders can simplify issues honestly yet clearly enough for the peoples to come to responsible decisions.
>
> Radio talks for discussion groups ought to provide endless practice in the honest and objective simplification of great issues. It will be upon the capacity of democratic peoples to respond critically to that sort of presentation of all issues that their future depends.[2]

Clients

The groups served many types of clients. General groups met in homes, in schools, or as part of the class activities of other voluntary organizations. Interest in forming church groups was concentrated in the period when the Archbishop of York headed the movement. Interest in library groups coincided with the interest in the groups by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. The BBC maintained a special concern for organizing listening groups among the unemployed from the Depression to the outbreak of the Second World War. The greatest amount of organization of the groups by the British armed forces occurred during and immediately after the war. Attention to forming groups of blind persons and groups in prison was concentrated in the early years of the movement. Rural groups were continually in the center of a controversy over whether the broadcasts contained simple enough language and focused on topics of local enough interest for farmers and villagers. Other special groups met in museums or on university premises or were composed of women or out-of-school youths.

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[2] Frank Ernest Hill and W. E. Williams, Radio's Listening Groups: The United States and Great Britain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 257.

Types of Broadcasts

The content of broadcasts prepared by the BBC for the groups shifted within a few years from factual and informative material to controversial treatments of current issues. Most group organizers believed that broadcasts involving controversies were much more discussible than informational programs. Lambert points out that this demand for lively broadcasts created a real problem for the BBC:

> The listening group movement [constituted] a small vociferous audience that was always calling for talks of an embarrassingly "pink" character—yet had no power to help the BBC defend or explain away these "awkward" broadcasts when they were criticised in the Press or in Parliament. . . . No wonder the BBC was timid and unhappy about the experiment.

Through the years there was a continual difference of opinion between some adult educators and some broadcasters about the proper character of the broadcasts. Many adult educators believed that a straightforward "serious" talk by a single expert was the best format. Broadcasters generally favored attempts at a variety of formats such as bringing several speakers together for a discussion on the air or presenting interviews with a number of "men in the street." As the BBC assumed more and more control over the broadcasts for the listening groups, the broadcasters' point of view began to prevail.

There was general agreement between the broadcasters and the educators that short series of broadcasts—usually three to six—on a single

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3. Richard S. Lambert, Ariel and All His Quality (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940), p. 52.

subject were not as effective as longer series. After the first few years of the experiments, most series were spread over twelve or more broadcasts.

Supplemental Printed Materials

A great deal of supplemental printed material was distributed to the groups over the years, yet little is known about the use to which it was put. In Lambert's opinion, the BBC was as "timid" about the content of the supplemental reading material distributed to the groups as he believed the corporation was about the whole experiment. As an example of this "timidity" Lambert cites the "Aids to Study" pamphlet he prepared for the first listening group series, which was on "A Hundred Years of Working Class History." Lambert states:

> One of the illustrations chosen [for the pamphlet] was a pictorial diagram showing the growth in membership of working-class organizations—trade unions, co-ops, and workingmen's clubs—during the past half century. So narrow was the BBC about this pamphlet that the censorial blue pencil was struck through that part of the diagram showing figures of trade union membership. We were not allowed to print evidence of the growth of this dangerous movement, though the figures were available in any popular book of reference.[4]

Though the BBC may have been timid about the content of some of the supplemental printed materials, it appeared not to stint the number distributed.

Group Leadership Arrangements

A basic issue which divided the movement was the question of the role of the leader of the listening group. Was he to be a teacher with expert knowledge of the subject who helped interpret the broadcast and answered questions when necessary? Or was he to be a lay person endowed with tact and some feeling for logical thought processes who acted as "the first among equals" in the group, helping the other participants to engage in a cooperative endeavor by simply asking discussible questions about the issues raised?

The original idea for the movement, held by those who believed in an independent role for the groups with some potential political function, was the concept of the leader as "the first among equals." The first pamphlet issued by the BBC on the groups said, "The work of the leader requires personality rather than scholarship, perseverance rather than discipline, a real belief in the value of education and a determination to bring every member into it."[5] In later years, those who wished the groups to spread among the less educated in rural areas continued to hold this view strongly.

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[4] Ibid., p. 53.

On the other hand, those who saw for the movement a role strictly limited to siphoning participants into other adult classes or acting as a superficial and occasional supplement to such classes strongly emphasized the concept of the leader as an expert. The main representatives of this point of view were the leaders of the Workers' Educational Association, the most powerful single organization in British adult education. Its representatives were seated on every committee ever connected with the listening group movement, and its executive officers occupied prominent places on the executive committees of the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education and the Central Committee for Group Listening. Although the WEA was concerned lest the groups achieve independent growth, for all of the movement's life it appeared to be a strong supporter, fully involved in all group activities. Yet when the movement was all over, and in 1949 the Beveridge Committee was examining BBC policy on it, the WEA submitted a memorandum with this conclusion:

> We watched the BBC listening group movement disappear "unwept, unhonoured and unsung." We never believed that discussion groups could be kept together unless they were in charge of experienced teachers who had a sound knowledge of the subjects that were being treated. If this condition were satisfied then the group was largely independent of the radio. We had no faith in week-end courses to provide "the technique of leadership" and urged upon BBC officers the opinion that the mechanics of leadership were no use to a "leader" ignorant of the subject that was discussed.[6]

In its report, the Beveridge Committee felt called upon to comment on the WEA's remarks in these words: "The Group Listening Scheme, as a frontal attack on passivity, had more to be said for it than is allowed by the Workers' Educational Association."[7]

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[5] As quoted in The Listener (BBC), December 30, 1931.

[6] Report of the Broadcasting Committee: 1949 (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 402.

[7] Ibid., p. 75.

Feedback Procedures

Listening groups experimented briefly with a variety of feedback mechanisms, but no single mechanism became a part of the general pattern.

Organizers sought two types of feedback: comments on the worth of the broadcasts themselves in terms of their value and interest and comments on issues discussed on the broadcasts.

Financing

The BBC financed most of the cost of the groups, but substantial amounts of money, donations of materials, and use of premises came from several other organizations. It is impossible to get even an approximation of the actual amounts the BBC spent, since the financial reports of the corporation are so sketchy. The BBC paid for the costs of the broadcasts for the groups, though after 1934 the broadcasts had to appeal to general audiences as well. It bore the cost of the supplemental printed materials over and above the modest amount paid for some of them by listeners. It also gave grants to support the various central councils and central committees, paid the salaries of the BBC education officers, and paid for most of the leader training. Substantial amounts also came from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in the early 1930's for group organization and from some Local Education Authorities in the late 1930's to pay leaders. Much of the financing was in terms of contributed services, materials, and premises. Organizations which frequently made such contributions included public libraries, YMCA's, WEA branches, Friends societies, and a few colleges.

From the very beginning the BBC made it clear that it did not intend permanently to bear the cost of organizing the groups. Originally it stated that financial support for group organization would end in 1940. But when the war started, after a brief lapse this period was extended. The end came in March, 1947, when the BBC announced it would provide no more money for group organization and in addition would broadcast no more programs designed to attract groups of listeners for discussion purposes.

The End of the Movement

The movement came to an end in Britain in 1947 because neither the broadcasters nor the adult educators were strongly committed to the idea and because each type of institution found much difficulty in establishing a working relationship with the other. If indeed the cluster of groups and institutions focusing on listening groups in Great Britain can be called a movement, it was a movement composed of uneasy allies, a movement of institutions working together on a tenuous basis and seeing the listening group at the most as supplemental to their main goals. For the movement to have been successful on a national scale, the institutions of broadcasting and the institutions of adult education would have had to have a strong priority commitment to the value of the listening group. This did not happen. It would also have been necessary for these two types of institutions to have worked out ways of meshing their gears in new forms of day-to-day cooperative operation. This did not happen either.

As the broadcasting institution, the BBC's commitment to the idea of the listening group is open to examination. Briggs, the most recent chronicler of BBC history, writes, "The place of adult education in the BBC's central organization was never secure."[8] Lambert writes, "Among the sceptics was to be reckoned J. C. Stobart, the BBC's Education Director. . . . In matters of education his outlook was limited to school broadcasting. Adult education was to him a rather mysterious and newfangled invention, for which he coined (so far as I know) the nickname 'Addled Education.'"[9] Lambert believes that by the early 1930's "it was becoming clear that no great future lay before the listening groups. . . . For by now the BBC hierarchy had lost interest in the unprofitable troublemaker—adult education; and the next four or five years saw many different schemes under consideration for bringing the experiment gracefully to a termination, so far as the BBC went."[10]

As for the institutions of adult education, the most powerful was the Workers' Educational Association. As noted above, the support of this organization was much weaker than it appeared on the surface. Williams speaks of "the alarm which such a development might cause among adult education organizations" if the group listening movement should indeed develop into a "continuous and separate movement." He states that the British "adult education organizations are sensitive about their 'running rights' in this field."[11]

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[8] Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), Vol. II, p. 222.

[9] Lambert, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

[10] Ibid., p. 74.

The Effect of the British Movement on Other Countries

Several other countries profited from the variety of experiments with the listening group conducted in Great Britain. A number of British supporters of the movement migrated to Canada, visited that country, or wrote for publications which were studied in Canada. The Canadian project, which is generally thought to have been the most sustained and successful one so far, owes most of its ideas for its approach to Great Britain. The British Movement also fostered the development of listening group projects in Australia, Sweden, and the United States.

THE UNITED STATES

Though the existence of listening groups in the United States is recorded as early as 1926, development on a significant national basis did not come until the middle and late 1930's. A number of experiments in the late 1920's and the early 1930's did lay some of the groundwork for later development.

The slower pace of growth when compared with that of Great Britain is due primarily to the difference in broadcasting systems. The question of government control aside, the United States system contains no real provision for nationwide distribution of all programs and no arrangement for effective national planning of broadcasts for all. Hundreds of independent radio and television stations, small and large, dot the landscape. Today the radio and television stations are joined by loose networks. In the early days of radio there was only one network, the National Broadcasting Company, and its arrangements with the local stations were even looser. The commercial nature of most of the stations resulted in a de-emphasis of educational broadcasts. It is little wonder that until the mid-1930's the majority of listening groups were attached to programs broadcast by local non-commercial radio stations.

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[11] Hill and Williams, op. cit., p. 180.

As in Britain, some intellectual leaders proclaimed the potential benign power of radio. John Dewey, for instance, called radio "the most powerful instrument of social education the world has ever seen."[12] But most leaders of thought couched their statements in careful conditional terms. Witness this statement made by Robert Maynard Hutchins in 1934:

> If industry will recognize unequivocally its responsibility to education; if education will work out a national plan that meets the needs of our people, I believe that the industry will prosper still; that education will be able to use at last the new tool that technology has given it, and that together we may take a significant step toward the civilization of our people.[13]

The fact is that until the mid-1930's many educators and their allies held out the hope that a significant percentage of the radio stations would become non-commercial and perhaps even government controlled. Consider this resolution passed in 1931 by the national organization of the certainly not radical PTA:

> We believe that radio broadcasting is an extension of the home, that it is a form of education; that the broadcasting channels should forever remain in the hands of the public; that the facilities should be fairly divided between national, state, and county government; that they should be owned and operated at public expense and free from advertising.[14]

When the Communications Act of 1934, which created the Federal Communications Commission, was being considered on the floor of the United States Senate, senators Wagner and Hatfield introduced an amendment that would have required 25 per cent of all radio station licenses to be distributed to non-profit groups. There was a provision in the amendment that non-profit stations would be permitted to sell just enough advertising to become financially self-supporting. Despite the support of the National Education Association, the National Association of State Universities, the National University Extension Association, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the National Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities, the Wagner-Hatfield amendment was defeated by a vote of 42 to 23. With the defeat of that amendment died the hopes of most educators for a nationwide radio system partially under the control of educators.

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[12] As quoted in Roscoe A. Stallings, "The Place of Radio in Modern Education" (Master's thesis, Mercer University, 1939), p. 83.

[13] Ibid., 82.

[14] As quoted in James Rorty, "The Impending Radio War," Harper's Magazine, 163 (November, 1931), p. 723.

Early Experiments

Women's Activities

It is a significant comment about American society that a great deal of the listening group activity in the United States before the Second World War was a direct or indirect result of the efforts of women's organizations. The first extensive experiment with listening groups was sponsored by the League of Women Voters. PTA's and other women's groups interested in child study sponsored a large number of groups in the early and mid-1930's. And the broadcast which had more groups attached to it than any other, "America's Town Meeting of the Air," was originated by an organization formed by female suffragettes, the League for Political Education.

League of Women Voters. As a result of an offer from the National Broadcasting Company, the League of Women Voters began presenting a weekly half-hour series of broadcasts in January, 1928 called "Voters' Service." The series presented a wide variety of speakers with differing viewpoints. It was designed to arouse the interest of voters, female and male, in political issues and to help clarify their thinking by increasing their ability to criticize proposals of all types.

During the first few weeks of the series, several league units formed listening groups for the broadcasts. An article written in 1928 describes the several varieties of listening groups which developed:

> Several suppers are held at homes equipped with good receiving sets, and these are often followed by organized discussion of the evening's topic. In one town the gathering first listens to the program and discusses it, then tunes in on music and ends up with dancing. Some of the broadcasting studios provide chairs in their reception rooms for those who have no radio at home. In one community, the local telephone is given up to the program during the half hour. In a large Eastern city the League meets at the broadcasting studio each week and entertains some other organization or club, which has five minutes at the close of the VOTERS' SERVICE program to talk about its own work. In one college the girls had their dinner hour changed in order to listen.[15]

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[15] Katherine Ludington, "Democracy Goes on the Air," Survey, 60 (June 15, 1928), p. 332.

Early programs ended with a list of suggested readings prepared by the American Library Association. Later, lists of readings were printed and mailed out. Most of the groups were organized by means of letters to interested members of the league, who then gathered groups together. There were no funds for real organization or publicity. Lack of funds may have been one of the chief reasons for the series' demise in 1934 after five years of broadcasting five months each year. The highest number of listening groups organized occurred in 1932 when 91 groups with about 1,100 participants were established to discuss four broadcasts on unemployment. The United States Office of Education characterized the league's efforts at organizing listening groups for the whole five-year series as "eminently successful," and commented particularly on the fact that the groups provided for feedback in the form of criticism of the broadcasts.

PTA's and other child study organizations. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, several state university systems and a variety of parent groups cooperated in setting up radio programs and organizing listening groups to discuss the programs presented over local radio stations. Most noteworthy were the experiments in Oregon, New Jersey, and Iowa.

Beginning in 1929 the Oregon System of Higher Education fostered parent education listening groups through special broadcasts on its own radio station. Organized study plans were prepared a year in advance with discussion questions and supplementary reading suggestions included. The series was presented in cooperation with such organizations as the American Association of University Women and the Federation of Garden Clubs of Oregon.

In New Jersey, a listening group series on child training and parent education was arranged as a result of requests for additional help from leaders of parent groups. The Extension Service of Rutgers University and the New Jersey College of Agriculture prepared brief series of broadcasts which were presented over a commercial station in Newark beginning in February, 1932. The groups, between 150 and 300 for each series, were organized by local units of the New Jersey Congress of Parents and Teachers. The series steadily increased in popularity until the fall of 1934 when the commercial station switched the broadcast time from the afternoon to 9:30 in the morning. The series, known as "The Homemakers' Forum," was so popular that when the Extension Service canceled it because of the erratic scheduling of the station, protests from listeners forced the station to appeal to the Extension Service to broadcast again. One pattern that developed was to broadcast three or four programs for the sake of discussion and then devote the next program to answering questions received from listeners as a result of the previous broadcasts.

In Iowa, two university radio stations began broadcasting the "Iowa Radio Child Study Club" for groups in 1932. "The Club" was an activity of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, which coordinated the child development work of the State University of Iowa, the Iowa State College, and the Iowa State Teachers College. Most of the groups were organized by local PTA's and others. But as an incentive the broadcasters sent free materials to groups while charging for the same materials when they were sent to individuals. As the programs became more popular, four series were broadcast simultaneously, one for each age level of the children the parents might be interested in. Parents were encouraged to stay in each group for a complete two-year cycle of four twelve-week series of programs.

The Women's National Radio Committee. The Women's National Radio Committee was formed in 1934 to coordinate the interest of a large number of women's groups in radio as a social force. Representatives of women's groups with a membership of well over ten million formed the committee. Some of the diverse groups comprising the committee included the American Legion Auxiliary and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the American Association of University Women and the Supreme Forest Woodmen's Circle, the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Association of Junior Leagues of America. One of the committee's major functions was to encourage its member organizations to form listening groups. The committee was hampered in discovering the effectiveness of its work by the fact that it had no direct contact with the ensuing groups and little information from the member associations about the number of groups actually organized.

The Activities of Edward R. Murrow and Chester Williams

In 1930, five years before Edward R. Murrow joined the Columbia Broadcasting System, he served as president of the National Student

Federation of America. Murrow and the executive secretary of the federation, Chester Williams, later a prominent adult educator, conducted a series of international broadcasts over CBS. The broadcasts featured world leaders such as Gandhi, Hindenburg, and Einstein, along with American leaders in foreign affairs. Through the facilities of the federation, between seventy-five and a hundred college groups gathered to listen to and then discuss the broadcasts.

"The Illustrated Radio Meeting"

In 1932 the Agricultural Extension Service at Ohio State University combined the use of slides with radio broadcasts and introduced the telephone for feedback purposes to produce "The Illustrated Radio Meeting." Slides had been used in conjunction with educational broadcasts in the late 1920's in geography classes in schools listening to broadcasts in Chicago, Illinois and for a large number of subjects in school broadcasts presented in Vienna, Austria. In the spring of 1932, Professor Van Rensselaer Sill at Ohio State arranged for the university radio station to broadcast special programs on rural problems to adult listening groups with county agricultural agents in each group operating slide projectors which were synchronized with the broadcasts. Participants in the groups were enthusiastic about the combination of broadcast and slides, but they were even more enthusiastic about the possibility of using special telephone numbers to call in questions and comments to the speakers on the broadcasts and about the fact that the speakers went back on the air later to discuss the questions and comments from the groups. The speakers received many more questions than they could possibly handle. Ohio State University continued to experiment with the use of slides and telephoned questions from rural listening groups through the early 1930's. The approach was also utilized with other than rural groups in different areas of the United States and in England. Most organizations reported little difficulty in synchronizing the slides to the broadcasts and noted great interest in the use of the telephone for feedback, with a subsequent program to discuss the phoned in questions.

The Kentucky Mountain Listening Centers

The University of Kentucky noted in the early 1930's that residents of the eastern mountain areas of the state were living in primitive conditions and were almost completely isolated from the outside world. The university successfully solicited donations of money and radio receiving sets. The radios were placed in schools, community centers, and general stores in the area with a community leader in charge of each center. A number of reports began to come in to the university of groups listening to educational programs and then discussing them.

The National Committee on Education by Radio

The National Committee on Education by Radio was formed in 1930 to represent the radio interests of nine educational associations including the National Education Association, the National University Extension Association, and the National Association of State Universities. Its major objective was securing exclusive use of 15 per cent of the radio licenses for educators. Among its other activities was the formation in November, 1932 of the American Listeners' Society. The society was designed to promote listening groups by recruiting organizations which would encourage groups on a local level and by publishing a monthly magazine with news of listening group activities. But after a few meetings in Washington, D. C., it became apparent that there was insufficient support for the society among the headquarters of the potentially interested organizations. The project was abandoned. The official history of the committee suggests that the society may have been started too soon. "Five years later," according to the history, "listening group activity was to emerge as an impressive and significant aspect of educational broadcasting."[16]

The National Advisory Council on Radio in Education

The National Advisory Council on Radio in Education was formed at the same time as the National Committee on Education by Radio. Each organization fostered opposing approaches. While the National Committee sought to wrest control of 15 per cent of the station licenses from the commercial operators, the National Advisory Council sought to work out cooperative arrangements with the commercial stations and networks to present educational broadcasts. The National Advisory Council was composed of prominent citizens not, as was the National Committee, of representatives from educational associations. It received its financial support from the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations.

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[16] Frank Ernest Hill, Tune in for Education: Eleven Years of Education by Radio (New York: National Committee on Education by Radio, 1942), pp. 46-47.

In the five-year period between 1932 and 1936, the council arranged for the cooperation of the National Broadcasting Company and the Columbia Broadcasting System in the presentation of a number of educational series. For all of these series the council encouraged the formation of listening groups but had insufficient funds to conduct any campaigns for the organization of the groups. Through local efforts, a number of listening groups did take advantage of some of the broadcasts. As a separate activity, the council arranged in 1934 for the publication of the first handbook for listening groups in the United States.

One series put on by the council was "American Labor and the Nation," broadcast by CBS in the early 1930's. Labor unions formed an undetermined number of groups to discuss this series.

In the spring of 1934, the Advisory Council cooperated with the Intercollegiate Council in presenting a series of nine special broadcasts called "The Approach of the United States to World Affairs." The Intercollegiate Council, an organization working nationally with students and young alumni, set up about two thousand listening groups to discuss the nine programs. Speakers included Henry L. Stimson, Adolph A. Berle, Jr., Glenn Frank, and Norman Thomas.

The longest series of programs arranged by the Advisory Council was called "You and Your Government." It was presented over NBC in cooperation with the American Political Science Association from April, 1932 to June, 1936. A committee of the American Political Science Association took responsibility for preparing the broadcasts, though they had little money to pay speakers or arrange for the writing of scripts. The Advisory Council learned that many local branches of the League of Women Voters, Junior Chambers of Commerce, and other civic organizations formed listening groups to discuss the broadcasts. But again no money was available to finance a nationwide organization campaign.

There was no difficulty with NBC over the content of the broadcasts, though some dealt with highly controversial issues. The principle problem was that the network, despite prior agreements, frequently changed the time or length of the broadcast and made it easy for local stations to drop the program for a local one with a commercial sponsor. At the end of the four-year series, the political scientist responsible for the radio work of the American Political Science Association concluded that there was "an irrepressible conflict between the commercial interests of the broadcasting company and the educational use of radio."[17]

The Climate Improves Markedly (1936-1940)

There were at least three factors in the political and cultural climate of the United States which supported the rapid growth of listening groups in the middle and late 1930's.

First, radio became a basic part of the American economy and culture in the mid-1930's. As the Beards described the mid-1930's change in American in Midpassage:

> In the strange times of midpassage, entertainment by radio expanded with the pressures of mass production, as inventions and improvements in devices flowed out of laboratories and workshops; and it responded to those forces, financial, intellectual, and moral, which affected other forms of diversion and communication. . . .
>
> Through the installation of the radio in private homes and hotels, in offices and shops, in schools and other institutions, in motor cars and trains, on tractors and plows, the market for receivers became almost universal in America. . . .
>
> On the basis of sales after January 1937, business leaders looked forward in August to 9,000,000 buyers of these perfected instruments for that single year. . . . Through radio enterprises, including radio-phonograph combination, the broadcasting business reached comparable proportions. The number of broadcasting stations mounted to 674 as of October 1937. . . . The Rockefellers provided New York with Radio City, in which the National Broadcasting Company settled permanently, occupying palatial quarters high in the sky. . . .
>
> Program by program the interests and passions of the throbbing universe were enlisted in the service of the radio.[18]

Second, the political climate changed to embrace discussion as one of the new panaceas for the ills of an economically depressed nation. Many thought the palliative of discussion might turn the people's attention away from more radical or violent means. In the late 1930's Sheats noted:

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[17] Thomas Reed, "Commercial Broadcasting and Civic Education," Public Opinion Quarterly, 1 (July, 1937), p. 67.

[18] Charles and Mary Beard, America in Midpassage (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 643-47.

> This revival of interest in public discussion stems from the 1929 breakdown in our economic machinery which only too vividly demonstrated the extent of our political ignorance and civic incompetency. Today reports show no sign of lessening interest. Forum and discussion groups of every conceivable kind and under all sorts of auspices dot the land and provide thousands of citizens with at least some opportunity for considering their common problems, experiencing such democratic values as free speech and free assembly, and acquiring that sportsmanship toward ideas without which no progress in a democracy is possible.[19]

And throughout this period, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was lending the weight of his rhetoric to the pressure for the application of maximalist democratic theory. At various times in the 1930's FDR said:

> All that we do seeks to fulfill the historic traditions of the American people. Other nations may sacrifice democracy for the transitory stimulation of old and discredited autocracies. We are restoring confidence and well-being under the rule of the people themselves. . . .
>
> In every walk of life in every part of the country it has become a normal and an interesting thing when two or more persons are gathered together for them to talk over methods of improving the economic and social lot of our citizenry. . . .
>
> We need to have meeting places for the discussion of public questions, in the cities, hamlets, and on the farms throughout the length and breadth of the land. . . .
>
> Forums for widespread and free discussion of public affairs are very much more than convenient expedients—they are vital necessities in the maintenance of democratic institutions.[20]

Third, the federal government directly involved itself legislatively and financially in both of these trends—the trend toward integrating radio as a means of expression into the daily life of the nation and the trend toward creating more and more opportunities for public discussion of issues.

In April, 1935, as the New Deal shifted its emphasis from recovery to "reform," Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act authorizing the expenditure of nearly five million dollars to provide work relief and to increase employment by providing useful projects under the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

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19. Paul H. Sheats, Forums on the Air (Washington, D. C.: USOE. 1939), p. 8.

20. As quoted in John W. Studebaker, The American Way: Democracy at Work in the Des Moines Forums (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), pp. 39-40; and J. Jeffery Auer and Henry Lee Ewbank, Discussion and Debate: Tools of a Democracy (New York: F. S. Crofts, 1941), p. 22.

The new commissioner of the United States Office of Education, John Studebaker, asked President Roosevelt for an allotment from the WPA funds to set up a special Educational Radio Project. The project began operating in January, 1936. It was shut down in June, 1940. In that time, over seven hundred Office of Education programs were broadcast by the two major networks, CBS and NBC. The project's allotment for 1936 was rather small. But following Roosevelt's landslide victory in late 1936, amounts allocated nearly doubled. In the four and a half years of its operation the project spent about $850,000, over 95 per cent of which came from WPA allotments.

At the same time that he started the Educational Radio Project, Studebaker also obtained funds from the WPA for the Federal Forum Project. The Forum Project was designed to promote public affairs forums meeting in local community centers around the country. Though not directly connected with the Radio Project, the Forum Project did promote the local broadcasting of a number of the public affairs meetings. In the five and a half years of its existence, the Forum Project spent about $1,500,000 of WPA funds.

Studebaker claimed that the organization of the Educational Radio Project was in direct pursuance of the January, 1935 report of the Federal Communications Commission to Congress, which stated that the FCC would supervise the cooperation between nonprofit groups and commercial broadcasters. The FCC did set up the Federal Radio Education Committee with Studebaker as chairman. Its members were drawn from the FCC, the broadcasting industry, and educational organizations. But it was not very active.

Another committee which Studebaker chaired, however, was much more active. This was a small advisory committee to the project, which included among its network representatives Edward R. Murrow, then at CBS. Murrow and the other network representatives picked the topic and the programs offered by the project for broadcast. Most of the twelve network series broadcast dealt with public affairs questions. Five of the series, which encompassed over a hundred broadcasts, examined such areas as civil liberties issues, the solutions to complex social problems, relations with Latin American countries, and problems of immigrants.

In addition to the preparation of the programs, the Educational Radio Project organized a nationwide script exchange and encouraged radio workshops in high schools and universities. By 1940 the United States Office of Education considered itself "the major center of national information" on educational radio. However, it was not the only government agency producing educational radio programs. In addition there were the activities of the Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, and Interior departments and the Federal Housing Administration. And the WPA, while continuing to provide almost all the funds for the Office of Education Project, established its own Federal Theater Radio Division to provide more employment for out-of-work talent.

Another strong indication of government interest in public discussion developed through the Cooperative Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture. Brunner notes:

> The Agricultural Adjustment Act, passed in 1933, required a further expansion of teaching in the economic area [for rural families]. In the middle 1930's, discussion of public affairs was begun and, before World War II, over 100,000 groups of farm men and women were spending winter evenings discussing public questions. The materials prepared for this activity, though dealing with controversial issues, gave well-balanced facts and opinions supporting all major points of view.[21]

The Great Surge of Interest: General

Government Involvement

The group listening approach was closely allied with the philosophies of both the Educational Radio Project and the Federal Forum Project of the United States Office of Education. Studebaker saw both of these projects and the listening groups as aspects of adult civic education, "as examples of the practical efforts which can be made to meet the crucial issue of supporting our democratic life educationally."[22]

From both of these projects and from other federal sources flowed government involvement in group listening. The Forum Project promoted group listening to the radio broadcasts of the many local forums. Federal aid helped to make it possible for some of the forum sponsors to send out pre-broadcast announcements and suggested reading lists to listening groups attached to some of the broadcasts. A government pamphlet describing the methods of the forum broadcasts contained a large number of suggestions and examples of the use of the broadcasts for groups. The Educational Radio Project prepared and distributed special printed materials for the use of the listening groups to accompany several of its broadcast series heard over the networks.

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[21] Mary L. Ely (ed.), Handbook of Adult Education in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 98.

[22] John W. Studebaker, Crucial Issues in Education (Washington, D. C.: USOE, 1937), pp. 16-17.

For a period of about a year, the WPA was directly involved in what it called a "Radio Study Groups Project," in conjunction with the National Youth Administration and the University of Wisconsin. The project, which covered part of 1936 and 1937, was designed to bring educational opportunities to adults and out-of-school youths in Wisconsin through the medium of listening groups attached to special broadcasts of the University of Wisconsin radio stations. The broadcasts, presented on a series called "The Wisconsin College of the Air," attracted over 300 listening groups with about 8,500 youths and adults in the spring of 1937. Some of the groups were led by out-of-work teachers paid by the Emergency Education Division of the WPA. Bulletins with suggestions for organizing groups and conducting them were distributed as well as study aids for each of the broadcasts. Lack of funds forced the WPA to end its participation in the activities before the end of 1937.

The National Youth Administration was also involved in another listening group project. This one was among the listening centers established in the mountains of eastern Kentucky by the University of Kentucky. Despite the increase in privately owned sets in the mountain area, the number of listening centers increased from fifteen in 1934 to about forty in 1940. In 1937 the National Youth Administration hired a supervisor for the listening groups which had been formed at most of the centers. The supervisor began her work by spending a week in each of eight specially selected centers with strong listening group programs. The Kentucky mountain listening groups discussed broadcasts dealing with such subjects as current events, parent-teacher work, health, and music appreciation. Probably the greatest and certainly the most visible of the federal government contributions to the listening group movement was the help given to Frank Ernest Hill in his preparation of the American portion of the first and only study of listening groups, Radio's Listening Groups: The United States and Great Britain, published in 1941 by the Columbia University Press. The Educational Radio Project of the United

States Office of Education, along with the Federal Radio Education Committee, contracted for Hill's services, provided him with research assistance, and sent out hundreds of questionnaires for data-gathering purposes. When Hill had completed his portion of the study, the Office of Education published a 35-page condensation of his efforts one year before publication in complete book form by Columbia University.

General Activity

Just before Hill began his survey of listening group activity, he wrote that he believed the listening group movement "has promised far more than it has yet performed." By the time he completed his study he concluded:

> [Listening groups] are far more numerous than teachers and radio officials have thought, and by the nature of their activity they are important in the mental, aesthetic and social life of the nation. . . .
>
> Radio and its groups may be as important to the democratic process as the railroad and motor car are to transportation.[23]

In the process of the survey, Hill supervised the sending out of questionnaires to all radio stations in the United States, to state colleges and universities, to libraries, to state National Youth Administration directors, to labor councils, and to CCC camps. Because of financial limitations, Hill was only able to follow up a small percentage of the leads he obtained. On the basis of rigid accounting and conservative estimating, Hill decided that for the 1938-1939 season "it seems reasonable that there are in the United States at least 15,000 organized groups meeting together to hear radio programs and that their activities touch from 300,000 to 500,000 Americans."[24]

The two most popular types of programs for which listening groups were organized before the Second World War dealt with public affairs and family life problems. There were also groups discussing programs of music, news, poetry, and gardening and agricultural information. In the areas of public affairs and family life education, intensive but sporadic efforts were made to provide additional reading materials for the groups, promote their organization, and offer support and service. In family life education, Hill reports that in 1938-1939 there were at least 2,250 groups active, with over 1,600 of these organized by the California Congress of Parents and Teachers. Gruenberg's study of the use of radio in parent education, conducted for the Child Study Association, listed eight other agencies serving listening groups. They were the Alabama College and State Department of Education, the Iowa University Child Welfare Research Station, Michigan State College Extension Service, the University of Minnesota Institute of Child Welfare, the New Jersey Extension Service in Home Economics, the Oregon State System of Higher Education, and the New York and Oklahoma State Departments of Education.

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[23] Hill and Williams, op. cit., pp. 39, 124.

[24] Ibid., p. 38.

The Great Surge of Interest: "America's Town Meeting of the Air"

It was in the area of public affairs education that the largest number of listening groups were reported before the Second World War. Most of these groups listened to and discussed the various broadcasts presented by local and national public affairs forum organizations.

The radio series with the largest single number of groups attached to it was "America's Town Meeting of the Air." Hill states that there were at least three thousand groups listening to the program in 1938-1939. He agrees with the program's producers that the number may actually have been over five thousand.[25]

"Town Meeting of the Air" was an outgrowth of the activities of the League for Political Education. The league was formed in the 1890's by a group of women working for female suffrage. By the mid-1930's, when the program began broadcasting over a nationwide network, the league had been transformed into an organization to promote talks on public topics by speakers representing a wide variety of positions. The league built and operated Town Hall in New York City to present the talks and to promote other educational activities.

The series, which went on the air first in May, 1935, was created and moderated by George V. Denny, the head of Town Hall, Inc. (as the league was renamed). The plan was to have two or more speakers with differing positions on a controversial topic speak briefly and then be questioned by the audience in the auditorium. "Town Meeting" was an instant success. Over three thousand fan letters were received within forty-eight hours after the first broadcast, which was on the subject, "Which Way America—Fascism, Communism, Socialism, or Democracy?" Newspaper and magazine attention was intense. In a typical year over five thousand newspaper and magazine articles and over a hundred and fifty editorials appeared commenting on the program or on Denny. The program became the model for many other forums presented under various auspices but usually not broadcast. "Town Meeting"—which was heard over nine hundred times until it went off the air in 1956—was the recipient of over fifty national awards. It was the first program to receive two Peabody awards. Norman Cousins, the editor of Saturday Review, who appeared frequently on the program, recently wrote this evaluation of the program and of Denny's contribution:

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[25] Ibid., p. 35.

> TOWN MEETING succeeded because it was a dramatic way of presenting public issues. Denny was a first-rate showman who knew how to deal with the elements of confrontation with respect to both the issue and the participants. Through the force of his own personality and stature, he was able to attract the nation's leading authorities. In this sense, he made TOWN MEETING considerably more than another debate show. More than a radio debate program, it became a major platform for public statements of important officials. Even more significant, perhaps, it became a vital classroom for the American people on important questions before the nation.[26]

Robert Saudek, who was a network liaison representative to the program at one time and has produced such educational television programs as "Omnibus" and "Profiles in Courage," wrote recently:

> In looking back to the 1930's and the 1940's I must say that the program AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR did represent a genuine and effective voice in those extraordinary times. . . .
>
> Furthermore, I believe the series attracted more national attention over a longer period of time than perhaps any such program does today.
>
> I believe it had almost as much to do with the nation's political decisions as the televising of the Kennedy/Nixon debates had to do with the national decisions two decades later.[27]

Immediately after the first broadcast in May, 1935, listening groups began to form to discuss the "Town Meeting" without any specific encouragement or suggestion from Denny. It appeared to the program's producers and supporters that several hundred groups formed spontaneously. Actually the groundwork laid by other organizations in the early 1930's was paying off. Within a year Reader's Digest reported:

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[26] Norman Cousins, Letter to John Ohliger.

[27] Robert Saudek, Letter to John Ohliger.

> [TOWN MEETING] is giving a radio public weaned on soothing syrup its first taste of raw meat. . . .
>
> Groups have formed all over the country for the express purpose of listening to AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR as a prologue to their own forums on the provocative subjects of the evening. Ranging in size from businessmen's clubs of 15 or 20 and YMCA crowds of 100, up to high school and CCC meetings with attendances as large as 350, these groups meet in schools, homes, prisons, on board ships, in barber shops, monasteries, bus stations, drug stores—anywhere a radio is available.[28]

Denny's immediate response to the apparently spontaneous formation of the groups was threefold. First, he arranged for the weekly publication of a transcript of the program in a bulletin that also contained news of the groups' formation. Second, he arranged with the New York Public Library to prepare bibliographies of suggested readings for each week's topic. Third, he arranged remote control telephone line setups so that a few of the listening groups in other parts of the country could be heard on the program itself, participating in the question period. This third aspect was soon abandoned for some unexplained reason, perhaps financial. Except for a few offers in later years to send comments from the listening groups on to interested congressmen and the publication of some comments in the bulletin, Denny did little with the feedback element of the listening group approach. In fact the whole area of the direct effect of the groups as groups on the political structure gave him great qualms. When a friend of his in the American Legion suggested he form listening groups all over the country offering aid to those groups whose members would pledge to write a letter of opinion to the appropriate local, state, or federal officials after each broadcast, Denny replied that he had "some doubts about the wisdom of so close a tie-up between education and political pressure." Denny made frequent comparisons between the "Town Meeting" and the old New England town meetings. But he never included the decision-making and action-taking aspects of the New England town meetings in the comparisons. In The Handbook for Discussion Leaders, later sent out to all listening groups which contacted the program, Denny outlined what he regarded as the necessary distinction between education and action:

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[28] Weldon Melick, "National Heckle Hour," Reader's Digest, 28 (June, 1936), pp. 42-43.

> Grave injustice can be done to the development of this work as a nationwide educational institution if local groups established as TOWN MEETING discussion clubs engage in political activity in the name of the group. On the other hand, on the roster of Town Hall members will be found the names of many great civic leaders who are active both in local and national politics. We urge all discussion groups to assist us in maintaining this distinction. As individuals, be as active and effective in political affairs as you possibly can, but keep your TOWN MEETING discussion group independent, and use it as a method of helping you to decide where you will use your influence and how you will cast your vote.[29]

About a year after Denny's initial threefold response to the interest in organizing listening groups, he tried a different approach. Denny went to the National Council of the YMCA in the fall of 1937 with the suggestion that the council might be interested in forming "YMCA-Town Meeting Discussion Clubs" in Y's throughout the nation. The council immediately approved the idea, began organizing the groups at the start of the third "Town Meeting" season in November, 1937, and within a few months over a hundred such groups were meeting weekly. At the same time, Denny obtained the cooperation of the Chautauqua Institution, the American Library Association, and the WPA in sending out a letter to these organizations' mailing lists offering to provide supplemental reading materials to any groups formed to discuss the broadcasts. The immediate response to the letter was so great it "swamped the small staff at Town Hall."

Denny perceived the immediate need to set up machinery for servicing the many requests for help. Within one month in early 1938 he raised over $30,000 to establish an Advisory Service. He employed Chester D. Snell, former Dean of the University of Wisconsin's Extension Division, to head the service. Snell was also made responsible for a new Short Course Division which set up afternoon and evening non-credit classes at Town Hall. Snell hired three assistants for the Advisory Service, one to maintain contact with libraries, churches, and men's organizations; another to advise teachers of high school and college groups; and a third to be in touch with women's organizations. It was believed that a staff of five assistants to Snell, ten corresponding secretaries, and five field agents would be needed to handle the volume of requests then coming in. The additional staff was never hired. The plan was to put the Advisory

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[29] George V. Denny, Jr., A Handbook for Discussion Leaders (New York: The Town Hall Advisory Service, 1939), p. 17.

Service on a self-sustaining financial basis within three years dependent only on fees charged to individual listening groups for services rendered. A below cost figure of ten dollars per year was established for the first set of services, which included the Overstreets' book on Town Hall, the weekly bulletin, suggestions for reading and discussion, promotional materials, and the privilege of corresponding with the Advisory Service about group problems. But even ten dollars proved to be too much for most of the interested groups. When the amount was cut to five dollars, the number of groups registered more than double, reaching two thousand. It soon became obvious to Denny and Snell that the Advisory Service would not have the facilities really to engage in the organization or maintenance of groups. About a year after the Advisory Service was set up, Snell stated:

> The spontaneous creation of listening and discussion groups around this program has become a development of utmost significance. We hope these groups will grow, and we will do everything in our power to assist them. We have set up an Advisory Service, not to dominate, not even to organize, merely to assist, through a sharing of experience.[30]

It was not possible for the service to arrange for or sponsor leadership or organizational training except for one program in New York City in May, 1941, aimed at rather high level personnel. Other national organizations took a sporadic but not continuing interest in establishing and maintaining groups. At times Denny received help from managers of local NBC stations in setting up groups. For one broadcast in February, 1940 on "Employers, Employees, and the Public," the Rotary International arranged for about three thousand Rotary clubs to become listening groups for one night. Without field workers and without a firm base of financial support for them, there was little that the Advisory Service could do other than send out materials from New York City and answer questions via correspondence. Even this was too much for the slender budget, and early in 1942 Snell left Town Hall to become a regional executive for the United Service Organization (USO). The Advisory Service sacrificed more than its head to the war effort. Snell was never replaced. The whole Advisory Service was disrupted by the war. The year 1942 was the low point for Town Hall in terms of memberships, attendance at events, and revenues. But 1942 was also the year when opportunities for listening groups doubled. When NBC was forced to sell its Blue Network, the new owners of the network persuaded Denny to increase his broadcasting season from twenty-six to fifty-two weeks.

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[30] Roy A. Benjamin, Jr., "Democracy by Discussion," Scribner's Commentator, 8 (June, 1939), p. 79.

Denny did make one sustained effort to raise money to support not only an Advisory Service but a general expansion of the whole Town Hall movement as well. At a dinner celebrating the 45th Anniversary of Town Hall on November 9, 1939, Denny announced what he called "The Five Year Plan for Democracy." It was a fund-raising project to get enough money to pay off the Town Hall's $300,000 mortgage, to expand the Town Hall, to create other Town Halls in a thousand cities, and to increase the number of listening groups to fifty thousand. All these objectives were to be accomplished within five years by raising three million dollars. The successful completion of the drive would mark the 50th anniversary of the Town Hall in November, 1944. Denny set up a fund-raising committee with such supporters as Wendell Willkie, Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., and Owen D. Young, and went to work. The committee and others spoke frequently of the need to raise the money to build more town halls and organize more listening groups so that

> There may be intermingled and turned into constructive channels many streams of ideas which, as they move through the turbines of orderly discussion, will generate the power of informed public opinion on which a democracy must rely for the solutions of its problems. Thus the purpose of the Town Hall movement is to create power plants of democracy all over America.[31]

But war came and attention turned to other matters. The 50th anniversary passed in 1944 with no announcement of the results of the five-year fund drive, although Denny did manage to raise enough money to pay off the mortgage on Town Hall.

After Snell left the Advisory Service in 1942, a number of sporadic attempts were made to service and encourage listening groups. Requests for information about forming groups and for help with problems of groups already organized continued to swamp the offices of Town Hall. But it was beyond the limited resources of the Town Hall even to keep an up-to-date mailing list of the listening groups, let alone correspond with them about their problems or help to organize more groups.

In December, 1945 the League of Women Voters organized several hundred listening groups on a one-time basis to discuss a broadcast on the question, "Can We Have Higher Wages Without Higher Prices?" In February, 1946 the New York City Adult Education Council set up thirty groups of veterans to discuss a broadcast on the question, "Do We Need More Democracy in Our Armed Forces?" Later in the same month, Rotary International organized 3,800 groups to listen to a broadcast on the question, "Are Parents or Society Responsible for Juvenile Crime?" Briefly in 1947 and again in 1951, announcements were made on the broadcasts that help was available to listeners interested in forming groups. But very little real help was available.

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[31] Bulletin of America's Town Meeting of the Air, VI (November 28, 1940), p. 27.

The net result of the efforts of "Town Meeting" was that before the Second World War, thousands of people were encouraged to start listening groups and were given the aid of supplemental printed materials, while many millions more at least heard about the idea of listening groups for the first time by being exposed to the many announcements made about the groups on "Town Meeting" broadcasts.

War and the Decline of Listening Groups in the United States

The three factors in the American political and social climate which facilitated the growth of listening groups in the middle and late 1930's no longer existed in the early 1940's as the country changed from a Depression emergency to a war emergency.

First, radio, which was becoming an integral part of American society, shifted into the high gears of commercialism and propaganda. In doing so, it responded to the great demands of advertisers for time because of paper shortages and other problems and to the requests of the federal government for more and more campaigns to help the war effort.

Second, the idea of discussion as a panacea for the economic ills of the nation went out the window when the rise of defense industries seemed to solve the problems. At this time there were still leaders who favored an increase not a decrease in discussion, as evidenced by a pamphlet published in 1942 by the American Council on Public Affairs. It was called Democracy by Discussion, and it was written by Dr. Emory Bogardus, a theoretician in the area of public opinion studies. The pamphlet carried an endorsing introduction by the Director of Adult and Civic Education of the United States Office of Education. The Council's advisory board of experts, which included C. J. Friedrich, Ernest K. Lindley, Sumner Slichter, Paul H. Douglas, Frank Graham, E. C. Lindeman, Clarence Pickett, Willard Uphaus, Clark Eichelberger, Max Ascoli, Harry Elmer Barnes, Harold Lasswell, and Peter Odegard, attested to the need for careful consideration of Bogardus' proposals. Here is one of those proposals:

> The radio listening-discussion group might be developed into a nationwide educational vehicle. Half the nation might go to school one night each week. Literally the whole nation at one time or another could go to school again under pleasant informal auspices. The U. S. Office of Education could work out attractive and interesting thirty to sixty minute programs. These could sparkle with ideas for discussion that would involve problems ranging from personality adjustments and local community upbuilding to national and international welfare.
>
> If there were enough of these listening-discussion groups and if they were widely enough distributed among all classes and types of people and in all parts of the nation, the President and the Congress could find in them an excellent sounding board of public opinion regarding matters of national import. The whole nation could participate in national affairs in a truly intelligent manner. Democracy could come into its own in a new and vitalized way.
>
> The New England town meeting could be revived in a modified way through these listening-discussion groups. People could once more have a voice in shaping their nation's affairs and at the same time grow in intellectual and social stature. It would be quite possible so to arrange the programs and so to encourage the public to participate in radio listening-discussion groups that people might think and act more democratically than they have ever done before. In this way national morale and international welfare might be continually reconstructed and developed.[32]

But such proposals by Bogardus and others really received no serious consideration as the maximalist approach to democracy seemed to go out of style for the duration of the war and as the need for faster and faster mobilization of industrial and human resources became apparent.

Third, federal involvement in radio as a means of expression and in the promotion of discussion activities came to an end at the beginning of the Second World War. In late 1940, Congress killed off the Educational Radio Project of the United States Office of Education by refusing to appropriate regular funds and by prohibiting the WPA from giving the project any more emergency money. Within a year all funds for the Federal Forum Project were cut off by Congress as well. Federal support also ended at about this time for the more than one hundred thousand groups of farm men and women who were meeting weekly each winter to discuss public affairs questions.

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[32] Emory S. Bogardus, Democracy by Discussion (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), pp. 21-22.

There was the possibility that discussion in general and the listening group movement in particular would get a shot in the arm from the government agencies concerned with the popular understanding of war aims and with public involvement in postwar planning. It was known in Washington that the English in the midst of the blitz had not only continued listening group programs for civilians but had spread the program to the armed forces as well, in addition to setting up a special compulsory program of discussions apart from the listening groups for the British armed forces. The English had even called on American experts for help in setting up the discussion programs.

There was some conversation among the staff of the United States Office of War Information about the possibility of actually organizing groups on a nationwide basis to discuss war aims and peace problems. But the money and additional staff were never forthcoming to do the job, and the OWI was confined in this area to producing discussion guides and "hoping for people to come to the OWI and get them."

Cartwright concludes that this is what happened in the United States when war came:

> When the Allies got into the war against the Nazis and the Fascists, the lessons taught by totalitarian leaders found willing response in the breasts of Allied leaders. Naturally, they were seeking power to wage so-called total war to its inevitable conclusion. Immediate adoption of totalitarian techniques of propaganda was the course pursued by our leadership in a superlative effort to combat totalitarianism. We used those techniques in occupied countries and in attempting to deal with the "undergrounds" in enemy territory. We used the same techniques both with friendly and with wavering neutrals.
>
> Even more importantly we employed these questionable means with our own population to acquaint our people with the war aims that we were seeking. . . . But what the people really wanted was understanding and full understanding is achieved only by a genuinely educative process. This means an examination of all sides of important issues, with the inalienable and unalterable right of the citizen to reach his own conclusion. And this our citizenry did not get, except as they themselves winnowed out the wheat from the chaff of tons of government print, untold hours of government broadcasting, unlisted miles of celluloid film. The mass media were turned loose upon the public as a substitute for education.[33]

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[33] Morse Cartwright, Annual Report of the Director of the Ameri-

The listening group movement could not survive such an approach. Where Hill had found fifteen thousand listening groups in the 1938-1939 period, there was evidence of only a few hundred groups in the United States by one year after Pearl Harbor.

GROUPS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The example of listening groups before the Second World War in a variety of countries with different political systems illustrates the possibility that the listening group approach is basically a neutral one which depends for its results on the ways in which the various elements of the approach are utilized. Groups in the Soviet Union were set up primarily for promoting industrial production, but were also organized for purposes of political agitation. Hitler arranged for the organization of listening groups while he was still a leader of an opposition party in Germany to help develop the support that aided him in taking power. Czechoslovakian listening groups stood as the most striking example of a project which stimulated action in the community until the advent of the Canadian Farm Radio Forum during the Second World War. Danish groups began to flower under the German occupation by tying in with the popular study-circle movement. Like Denmark, Finland tied its development of listening groups in with the study-circle movement. Norway experienced a modest listening group development following nationalization of its broadcasting system in 1934. Sweden, influenced by the British system, fostered a large number of listening groups in the early 1930's but lost most of them when the broadcasters turned over the organization of the groups to adult educators. Austria, Holland, and Australia also experimented with listening groups before the Second World War.

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can Association for Adult Education: 1946-1947 (New York: AAAE, 1947), pp. 8-9.

Chapter III

PROJECTS DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR II

CANADA

"The Canadian Farm Radio Forum"

Adult educators generally have regarded the listening group projects started in Canada during the Second World War as outstanding examples of such efforts. The most prominent of these projects, the "Canadian Farm Radio Forum," came into existence on a nationwide basis in 1941 through the collaborative efforts of three relatively new Canadian organizations—the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA)—which had separately been subject to influences predisposing them to starting such a project. These organizations quickly agreed, after a brief period of experimentation, on a stable pattern for the project which persisted relatively unchanged until the "Farm Forum" was shut down in the spring of 1965. The unique elements of the pattern which drew the most international attention were the emphases on feedback, supplemental printed materials, and local community action projects. After reaching a peak of about thirty thousand rural participants in 1950, the "Farm Forum" groups gradually diminished until in 1965, when the project was ended nationally, there were about two thousand participants left.

Elements in the "Farm Forum" Design

So much has been published about the general pattern of the "Canadian Farm Radio Forum" that only brief mention will be made here of the various elements and their combination. The most important historical conclusion is that the "Farm Forum" represents the first example of a firm pattern of elements which were decided upon by the sponsors in advance on the basis of study of previous attempts in other countries and on the basis of brief experimental projects. The pattern which was established in the beginning persisted with very few changes until the end, twenty-five years later. None of the elements were invented by the Canadians. All had been tried in brief or sporadic experiments in other countries, chiefly Great Britain. But the combination of elements was new.

Purposes and outcomes. The purposes of the "Farm Radio Forum" were:

> To give farmers a new incentive to group action and neighborliness, and to stimulate thought and understanding among rural listeners which will widen their horizons as citizens and help them improve their conditions as farmers.[1]

The most frequently noted outcomes were in the areas of local community action and national political effect. Results of weekly polls taken of each group were publicized widely and frequently affected national policy-making. The outcome that has drawn the most attention of adult educators, however, has been the activity on the local level. Groups were encouraged to reach decisions and then take action on a large number of issues that called for local community projects of a self-help type. In a typical year (1947-1948), over half the groups reported engaging in action projects. Among the most frequent were getting local laws changed, improving schools, setting up cooperatives, constructing recreation facilities, building community centers, establishing rural electrification, arranging for collective purchase of farm machinery, and improving local roads.

Clients. The groups were composed in the main of men and women from farms which harvested mixed crops. The majority of the members were between the ages of thirty and fifty. The average size of a group was seventeen.

Types of broadcasts. Typically, three broadcasts out of four were devoted to examining various topics from all sides on an impartial basis. Each half hour broadcast contained twenty-five minutes on the topic and five minutes devoted to a presentation of feedback from the previous week's broadcast on a regional network basis. The fourth week's broadcast was usually devoted to a summary of feedback from the previous three broadcasts on a national basis. The topics covered included farm mechanization, finance, labor, price, and marketing questions; community life issues; education; nutrition and health; social security and insurance; and international questions. Types of presentation included the dramatized broadcast, the panel discussion, a speech, an interview, and a combination of these types. No type was judged the best. The main considerations in selection were the appropriateness of the type to the topic and an attempt to present a variety of types of broadcasts.

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[1] R. Alex Sim, Canada's Farm Radio Forum (Paris: UNESCO, 1954), p. 5.

Supplemental printed materials. Heavy emphasis was placed on the use of printed materials. During most of the history of the "Farm Forum," The Farm Forum Guide, a brief leaflet, was distributed to each participant in advance of each substantive broadcast. In addition to providing fuel for discussion and giving the leader some suggested questions to ask, the Guide was intended to provide a general frame of reference, help with recruiting, and add to the sense of unity of the groups. Other publications included an occasional newsletter, a year-end summary of group decisions and actions, and a handbook of general information for prospective groups.

Methods of group organization. The three sponsoring institutions set up a semi-autonomous organization, the National Farm Radio Forum, to supervise organization and other details. At the provincial level the pattern of control varied. It included independent associations, university extension divisions, and provincial CFA offices. Groups were organized by field workers, by area committees, in cooperation with other organizations, and through mail contact. Though it was generally agreed that the employment of field workers was the most effective organizing device, this technique was the least used.

Methods of post-broadcast discussions. When the broadcast was over, the group discussed informally the material just heard and attempted by argument, compromise, and persuasion to reach conclusions on the questions posed in The Farm Forum Guide. The leader of the discussion then attempted to formulate the opinions of the group and sent them on to the provincial office. Following the discussion, the groups frequently participated in social activities—games, dancing, and refreshments.

Group leadership arrangements. In almost all cases, the leaders were chosen by the members of each group or were self-selected. Typically, they were local farmers with no special subject matter competence or experience in leading discussion groups. Some of them received training in leading discussions. And the national office attempted to ease the work of the leaders by the careful preparation of the suggested discussion questions printed in the Guide. Sometimes these questions were pre-tested with special groups and leaders before being printed for national distribution.

Feedback procedures. Throughout the history of the "Farm Forum," the national sponsors placed consistent emphasis on the extensive use of feedback procedures, careful preparation of supplemental printed materials, and the desirability of action resulting from the discussion. It was the long-time emphasis on the combination of these three elements that brought most of the international attention to the "Farm Forum."

There were two types of feedback encouraged—the feedback on the issues of the broadcasts sent in weekly and the feedback on the choice of topics themselves, fostered by annual questionnaires and conferences. Thus the participants regularly expressed themselves on a variety of issues, heard their opinions summarized on later broadcasts, and also helped in choosing the subject matter of future broadcasts.

Financing methods. Except for the costs of the broadcasts themselves, which were absorbed by the CBC, the expenses were underwritten by the CAAE, the CFA, the provincial offices, and the individual forums themselves. Typically, the CAAE and the CFA covered one half of the costs of the national budget while the provincial offices contributed the other half after collecting as much as possible from the forums themselves. The expenses of the provincial offices had to be met in most cases without help from the national office, thus creating a different pattern of support in each province.

Early Growth and Slow Decline

In the first year of national operation, over 400 groups were organized to discuss the winter broadcasts. The next season, 1942-1943, the number of groups topped 1,000. The peak was reached in the 1949-1950 season with over 1,600 groups containing about 30,000 participants.

Starting in 1950, the number of groups began to drop at the rate of between 100 to 150 per year until in 1958 there were about 500 groups meeting with about 5,000 participants.

Beginning in 1958, "a rather feverish round of activity was generated to sustain the Farm Forum." New radio techniques were introduced, including the broadcast of edited tapes of the groups themselves discussing previous broadcasts and the use of the "hotline" for telephoned questions. There was even a local experiment with the use of television. Different organizational approaches were attempted with the subsequent encouragement of groups meeting a few times instead of on a continuing basis. The organization of "community," "special interest," or "commodity" groups even resulted in the 1962-1963 season in the first increase in registered groups since 1950. Rodger Schwass, the editor-manager of the "Farm Forum" in the last years, says that in addition, "survey after survey was conducted to determine just what topics might generate discussion group enthusiasm, but no formula worked."[2] By the 1963-1964 season, the number of registered groups was down to about 300.

In the last season, the winter of 1964-1965, there were about 230 groups registered, with an average of 2,000 participants each meeting. Forum headquarters operated with part-time staff and offered reduced services. In January, 1965, the Board of the National Farm Radio Forum voted to recommend to the sponsors "that the National organization of Farm Forum, constituting the present National Office and staff, together with the publication of Farm Forum Guide, should be discontinued at the end of the season." All of the Forum's assets and liabilities were transferred to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture by the end of April, 1965.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation decided to continue broadcasting a farm program which, though designed for individual listening, might be utilized by some groups for discussion. The provincial organization in Quebec continued active encouragement of the groups with plans to publish its own supplemental pamphlet material. Groups in Alberta, Ontario, and the Maritimes also continue to receive some help from provincial organizations. The CBC agreed to broadcast at a different time from the regular farm program some of the feedback from the remaining groups if their reports were of "sufficient interest."

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[2] Rodger Schwass, Letter to John Ohliger.

Other Activities

"Citizens' Forum". "Citizens' Forum," similar to the "Farm Forum" but designed more for discussion of current events by urban groups, is still operating in Canada. However, after dropping from about 800 to about 400 groups between 1944 and 1950, the "Citizens' Forum" groups quickly dwindled to the handful there are today.

"Nunaliit". In early 1965, the Centennial Commission of the Canadian government provided a grant of money to R. Alex Sim, the author of several articles on the "Canadian Farm Radio Forum," a former director of it, and the editor of the UNESCO book on the farm forums. Sim surveyed the feasibility of starting a listening group project among the Eskimos and the Indians in the Northern Territories of Canada. As a result of the survey, the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Northern Service agreed to undertake a joint pilot project. The project started in January, 1966, at Inuvik in the Northwest Territories and is known as "Nunaliit" (pronounced *noona-leet*), which expresses in Eskimo "the idea of a community, a settlement, a camp, a place where people come together to talk, make decisions, and act." It is designed to help the Indians and Eskimos of the North improve their economic, social, and educational status by community development. Though a great deal of Canadian government money and even a few government personnel are involved, the conduct of the program is non-governmental.

Aside from the "Nunaliit" project, there is very little listening group activity now going on in Canada. Three tentative generalizations may be cited to explain the dynamics of the decline of Canadian listening groups: as the sponsoring institutions matured, their concerns diverged more and more; a fully working field structure for organizing and maintaining the groups was never established; and the groups never became integrated into the fabric of Canadian society. The influence of the Canadian groups, however, lives on in the projects, described briefly below, modeled after them and fostered by UNESCO in the underdeveloped areas of the world.

UNESCO

UNESCO interest in the listening group started in the early 1950's with the publication by UNESCO of literature on the "Canadian Farm Radio Forum." The "Farm Radio Forum" subsequently became the model for a number of projects aided by UNESCO in France, Japan, India, Italy, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, and several African countries. UNESCO also promoted the listening group approach by publishing additional studies of some of the newer projects and by sponsoring conferences and training courses.

As a result of these experiments with listening groups, UNESCO officials have concluded that the approach is essential to the educational use of mass media designed to stimulate social and economic development especially in rural areas of developing countries but also in urban areas and in already developed countries. Several countries which conducted experiments with UNESCO aid have now established permanent projects on their own.

When looked at from the point of view of the various elements in the approach, a number of common themes and differences of emphasis appear in the projects sponsored or studied by UNESCO. The primary purpose of the Canadian project was to help the farmers affect policy on a national level. But the primary purpose of the listening groups sponsored by UNESCO is to inculcate information in order to change attitudes in order to stimulate local "self-help" action of the community development type.

There are a number of reasons for the difference in purpose between the Canadian project and the UNESCO-financed ones.

First, the Canadian program was based on a political principle—that "men of ordinary education can understand the world they live in, and that, with knowledge they can exercise more and more intelligent control over their social and economic environment."[3] The UNESCO-financed groups, on the other hand, were based on an educational principle—that "education requires personal, intensive and systematic study based on the active participation of those who are to be educated."[4]

Second, each of the UNESCO-financed projects was required to carry with it a scientific, statistically measurable evaluation. Methods have been devised without too much difficulty for measuring changes in knowledge and attitudes. And local action projects are relatively easy to count. But measuring the effect of local groups on national policy is far more difficult.

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[3] R. Alex Sim, "Canada Farm Radio Forum," Fundamental Education, II (October, 1950), p. 10.

[4] Henry Cassirer, "Television and Fundamental Education," Fundamental and Adult Education, IX (1957), p. 191.

Third, and probably most important, UNESCO was interested in the listening groups as a method which would be helpful to the developing societies. The introduction of a means for changing national policy might have been too threatening. The most urgent need appeared to be for any device which would produce visible movement toward modernization and economic development in rural areas.

In all the projects UNESCO has encouraged client participation in broadcast preparation, the wide use of supplemental printed materials, the deployment of a sufficiently large field organization staff, an informal approach to group leadership and discussion, and the frequent utilization of a variety of feedback procedures to foster participation, action, and learning.

THE UNITED STATES

It is more difficult to locate and describe listening group activities in countries where UNESCO has not fostered such projects. First, UNESCO projects had, by and large, a single purpose—encouraging local community action. But in other countries, especially the United States, projects have been sponsored for a wide variety of purposes. Second, in countries like the United States there has been no government sponsorship and little government interest in the postwar period, resulting in an even greater diversity of sponsorship. Third, Eugene Johnson points out that, especially in the United States, "much of this activity is carried on under the sponsorship of non-educational institutions," making the projects even more difficult to locate. Johnson predicts that "given the nature of American society, this is likely to continue."[5] In addition, the ephemeral nature of much of the postwar activity adds to the problem of knowing whether some of the projects described below are still in operation or just what their current status is.

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[5] Eugene I. Johnson, Letter to John Ohliger.

Early Postwar Activities

Several organizations in the United States began to experiment with the use of television for listening groups as soon as it was introduced on a mass scale. In Schenectady, New York, the Citizens Unity Council in 1948 sponsored what may well have been the first experiment with television and listening groups. The council produced a series of local television broadcasts called "The Jury of Public Opinion," viewed regularly by community groups and discussed under leadership of members of the city's adult education staff. Before 1953 a number of experiments with television and listening groups took place in Iowa. In addition to a series on Iowa television which influenced the French use of listening groups, there was considerable activity in Des Moines under the aegis of the Adult Education Department there. The department built on its experience with film discussion series to produce a number of half-hour television programs called "What Do You Think?" A panel on each broadcast examined "one of the beliefs to which we pay lip service"; listening groups organized by the Executive Committee of the Des Moines Adult Education Council discussed the subject and then telephoned their reactions to the station, which arranged for a discussion of this feedback on a subsequent broadcast.

The most powerful impetus to United States listening groups in the postwar period came from the Fund for Adult Education (FAE), established by the Ford Foundation in 1951. The FAE was devoted to the concept of discussion and to promoting the educational development of the mass media, especially radio and television. One of the FAE's first activities was to provide grants for a "Test Cities Project" in twelve municipalities throughout the country. According to the FAE "most of the twelve cities and one region participating tied the mass media and study-discussion groups together."[6] Two of the twelve test cities made the most use of this approach—Sioux City, Iowa and San Bernardino, California. After a number of earlier activities, in the spring of 1956 the Adult Education Project of the Sioux City Public Schools presented a series of eight television discussion programs utilizing the materials of the FAE's You and Your Community packaged-set. Two commercial television stations presented the broadcasts and a local newspaper carried special supplementary articles. Thirty listening groups with about six hundred participants were formed to engage in what was essentially a study of the various resources and problems of the local community.

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[6] FAE, Continuing Liberal Education: Report for 1955-1957 (White Plains, New York: FAE, 1957), p. 31.

Eugene Johnson and Metroplex

But it was in San Bernardino earlier in the 1950's that the financial encouragement of the FAE bore the most fruit. Out of the San Bernardino experience developed a pattern of listening group elements which provided a focus for a large number of projects in the middle and late 1950's. The catalyst for this new model was Eugene Johnson, now executive secretary of the Adult Education Association. The projects he developed utilizing radio in San Bernardino and television in St. Louis are no longer in operation, but their influence lives on as a model for whatever modest listening group activity there is in this country today. Because Johnson has provided a full historical treatment of his work in San Bernardino and St. Louis in two readily available pamphlets,[7] discussion here will be limited to some comments on the elements Johnson emphasized and on some of the possible reasons his approach has been so frequently emulated.

Briefly, Johnson came to San Bernardino Valley College in 1952 to head the FAE Test Cities Project there. Conceiving it as a program of community development with emphasis on the role of the individual in existing community structures, he began to develop the concept of a campaign on some community-wide problem using a large number of educational techniques. At the suggestion of Glen Burch of the FAE, he included the listening group as one of the major educational techniques in 1953, and from then on began to develop more fully an approach which he called "thematic coordination." Johnson defined the term as "the coordination of many kinds of community resources, insights and skills into the development of a community-wide program around a single theme."[8] The word "metroplex" was coined to describe the psychological entity resulting from the integration of the listening group approach into this concept in an urban setting.

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[7] See Eugene I. Johnson, The Community Education Project: A Four Year Report (San Bernardino: San Bernardino Valley College, 1957); and Metroplex Assembly: An Experiment in Community Education (Brookline, Mass.: CSLEA, 1965).

[8] Johnson, The Community Education Project, p. 45.

In 1956 Johnson was invited to St. Louis to try the same approach, this time utilizing television as a focus. He left St. Louis in 1963 to take over his present position with the AEA. His first listening group project in San Bernardino in 1953 attracted 97 groups for discussions of cultural anthropology. His last, in 1963 in St. Louis, attracted 524 groups for discussions of the problems of adolescence.

The Elements in Johnson's Design

In addition to the various elements described below, several other comments on Johnson's work are pertinent. First, Johnson was not reluctant to use the techniques of show business and public relations in developing a project. For instance, in fostering a series of listening groups based on the packaged discussion materials of the FAE called The Jeffersonian Heritage, he held a promotional public meeting entitled "An Evening with Thomas Jefferson" which included "instrumental and dance numbers of the colonial period." He had considerable success enlisting the interest of the daily newspapers in his work not only as a legitimate news story but as a project in which the papers would cooperate in promotion and even in the provision of the space and the writers for supplemental reading materials. Second, whatever theme he developed (he usually presented one project in the fall and another in the spring), he tried to find the theme in the expressed desires of the various local organizations and to develop the concrete outlines of that theme with the participation of as many interested people and associations as possible.

Purposes and outcomes. Viewing the listening group as Johnson did in San Bernardino and St. Louis as part of a program of community development, the major goal of the projects in the early years in those urban areas was "restoring a sense of community." If either project had ever gotten beyond the earlier years, then the general goal would have probably changed to attacking and solving specific community problems directly. Johnson felt that the San Bernardino project was somewhat more successful than the one in St. Louis in restoring a sense of community. He believed that the specific educational objectives of the general goal needed to be stated in terms of concrete behavioral changes, both overt and covert, but commented that "community education is, however, a long way from having effective and reliable means for measuring whether the objectives have been reached."[9] Some of the indications that a sense of community is being re-established are, according to Johnson, the shift to the study of local problems and conditions by service clubs and other civic organizations; increased attendance at public meetings on community matters; growing awareness that there are diverse points of view on community problems; an increased interest in questions about the future of the urban area; and the increased ability of the listening group project to get all segments of the community to focus on specific community-wide areas of concern.

Clients. Johnson's target client was determined by his general philosophy of social change; the specific client composition of each listening group was determined on pragmatic grounds. Johnson's general philosophy of social change is stated in this one sentence:

> Social change will be accomplished with less disturbance and with maximum understanding and acceptance if widespread citizen participation is encouraged in studying the circumstances of change and formulating policies to guide it.[10]

Faced with the impossibility of involving every citizen, Johnson determined that it was necessary "to bring into the education process the 'influentials' from practically every segment and subdivision of the population mass." He devoted extra personnel and money to attracting "influentials" from some of the more difficult to reach segments of the community. In regard to the San Bernardino project, he commented especially on the establishment of three listening groups in the Mexican-American community, on the fact that 60 per cent of the participants in one series said they had never engaged in an adult education activity before, and on the fact that in another series 40 per cent said they had only a high school education or less.

When determining the specific composition of each listening group, Johnson did not seek to set up a microcosm of the community. Instead he called on the organizers of each group "to pick a group of people who will enjoy each other's company." He found simply that groups of friends tended to persist while listening groups organized consciously on a neighborhood or other basis did not.

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[9] Johnson, Metroplex Assembly, p. 47.

[10] Ibid., p. 49.

Types of broadcasts. Johnson used a variety of means of encouraging client participation in broadcast preparation. In San Bernardino for some series he set up a different community-based committee to develop the "idea-structure" for each broadcast in the series. In St. Louis a principle was fostered in producing each televised series that each important community issue should be developed "from the inside out." Johnson wrote that "from the inside out . . . means simply that a living, vital problem ought first to be stated by the people who have the problem and are the most deeply involved in it."[11]

Supplemental printed materials. Johnson placed great emphasis on the use of supplementary printed materials for all the groups he was involved with. His unique contribution here may have been the demonstration that it is possible to persuade large metropolitan newspapers to print such materials. In regard to the use of supplementary printed materials, there was one problem that Johnson felt was beyond the resources of the San Bernardino or St. Louis projects to solve:

> While reading material can be very helpful in providing additional facts and information about the topic under discussion, reading material should be prepared or made available at different levels of reading difficulty. Unfortunately, the majority of civic-minded people who respond to a television broadcast on a civic issue are not print-oriented and most of the material on civic issues is written at a level of understanding that requires a minimum of a high school education. To relate printed materials to the television broadcasts so that all levels of education and sophistication are adequately served, requires resources considerably beyond those of the Metroplex Assembly project.[12]

Methods of group organization. Johnson felt very strongly, on the basis of his experience in San Bernardino and St. Louis, that in order for field organization work to be effective it had to be done by paid workers, not volunteers. He frequently attributed the problems in expanding the projects to the lack of funds to hire additional organizers. However, his concept of the role of the paid organizer was one which actually provided for a great deal of voluntary organizing activity. Specifically, he defined the job of the paid organizer as that of recruiting and training volunteer organizers, each of whom would establish and sometimes lead one listening group.

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[11] Ibid., p. 27.

[12] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

Methods of post-broadcast discussion. Johnson's emphasis on "the importance of the individual" resulted in his decision not to try to get listening groups to reach group decisions and then take action on the basis of these decisions. However, he did tend more and more toward encouraging each individual in the groups to reach his own decision on the problem at hand. In addition, he encouraged the groups to reach agreement on the question they wished to submit as feedback.

Group leadership arrangements. The more experience Johnson gained with listening groups the more he became convinced that the groups should not be required to be too dependent on the leader. He reached this conclusion on the simple pragmatic ground that it was impossible to provide adequate training for leaders. Though his projects did provide some leadership training, to overcome what he regarded as an insurmountable problem he tried to structure the whole experience so that the groups could survive without trained leaders. First, he encouraged rotating leaders in the groups. Second, he felt that dependence on group leadership would be reduced if a "sense of interrelatedness" was promoted among the various groups. He tried to accomplish this goal by emphasizing the value of the feedback procedures described below and by encouraging the groups to feel the "invisible presence" of the moderator of the broadcast when the set was turned off.

Feedback procedures. By reviving, adapting, and firmly integrating into the whole project a feedback procedure first developed in 1932, Johnson gave a special stamp to the combination of elements he devised. In 1932, Ohio State University provided the first known example, in "The Illustrated Radio Meeting," of encouraging groups to phone in questions after a broadcast and then presenting a later broadcast during the same group meeting to discuss the questions. Johnson may not have been aware of Ohio State's experience, but twenty-three years later he began to use this technique. Johnson raised the technique to the level of a "privilege" by emphasizing to the listening audience that only registered groups could call in questions. He tried to make the second broadcast (or Phase II, as he called it) on the same evening of intrinsic interest in order to hold the attention of the groups and the rest of the audience, and often used the second broadcast to create news stories. Frequently, the first broadcast would be in the form of a documentary, while the second would contain a panel of experts who had not been seen or heard on the first broadcast. Johnson used other feedback techniques as well, including opinion ballots to be mailed in by individual participants, and occasional conferences of groups and group leaders or organizers to examine issues raised on the broadcasts and to plan for future series.

Financing methods. Both of the projects Johnson headed were almost completely financed by grants from the Fund for Adult Education. One critic of his project in St. Louis felt that the cost was "enormous . . . and out of proportion to the number of participants reached."[13] But Johnson continually spoke of a lack of adequate funds. As for other financing methods than foundation grants, Johnson concluded that the kind of project he had in mind "cannot be supported by fees paid by participants." Again he reached that conclusion on pragmatic grounds. The attempts of his staff to reduce direct costs of the projects through the sale of reading materials and by soliciting contributions were not very successful.

Projects Influenced or Aided by the Johnson Approach

From 1959 to 1961 Johnson was granted a leave from his work in St. Louis "to service the many communities who were interested in duplicating the St. Louis experience."[14] He reported in 1963 that the St. Louis project had stimulated similar programs in a score of other cities.

"Great Decisions". The Foreign Policy Association (FPA) studied Johnson's work while he was still in San Bernardino and adapted it for a new listening group project first tried out in Portland, Oregon and called "Great Decisions." As the popularity of "Great Decisions" began to spread throughout the country, a new twist was placed on the combination of elements in this use of the listening group approach. The "kits"—sets of supplementary printed materials on a variety of foreign policy issues —actually form the nucleus of the project instead of the broadcasts. Radio and television broadcasts in many areas are thus considered supplements to the kits and to the discussion of the printed materials. Two of the three surveys made about the "Great Decisions" project are based on investigations of the purchasers of the kits.[15] It is much easier to keep track of kit buyers than of listening groups which frequently do not let the sponsors know of their existence. The survey of the Boston "Great Decisions" project indicated that an "overwhelming number of groups" watched the television broadcasts on the assigned topics.[16] However, the survey of the Wisconsin groups indicated a lack of cohesion in the whole project resulting from the fact that the broadcasts there did not form the focus of the groups.

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[13] Leonard S. Stein, "Review of 'Metroplex Assembly,'" Adult Leadership, 14 (February, 1966), p. 278.

[14] Johnson, Metroplex Assembly, p. 33.

"The People's Lobby". Sometime in the late 1950's Jarvis, at the Extension Division of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, developed a project similar in format to Johnson's "Metroplex Assembly." Jarvis called his "The People's Lobby."

Antioch College Adult Groups. Also in the late 1950's, Booth at the Office of Continuing Education of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio began to offer enrollment in listening groups to adults. The groups listened to and discussed broadcasts presented over the college FM radio station with the aid of supplemental printed materials. The college supplied trained leaders and organized the groups on the basis of enrollments received. A unique aspect of Booth's project was that it tried to survive partly on the basis of fees charged to participants. One series presented on "American Civilization" in 1960 with recordings and readings by Max Lerner, Professor of American Civilization at Brandeis University, charged $7.50 per person or $10.00 per couple. When Booth moved to Los Angeles, he carried with him this belief that listening groups could be self-supporting. And his belief that such projects could exist without institutional support was one factor in the establishment of a project run completely by volunteers in Los Angeles and called "The Community Discussion Project."

"The Community Discussion Project". In the summer of 1960, Len Harris, who had worked on Johnson's San Bernardino project, started with the advice of Booth a volunteer listening group project in the Los Angeles area which had no institutional connection whatsoever and no financial support other than the contributions of the participants. Harris persuaded a local, independent non-commercial FM station, KPFK of the Pacifica Foundation, to put on discussible broadcasts every Friday evening. Since 1960, between seven and twenty groups have been meeting in homes to discuss the broadcasts. The project has become a permanent feature of the Los Angeles scene. The informal and social aspects are stressed in the groups. Most of the groups are open to the public, have no trained leaders, and rarely discuss related subjects from week to week; the group meetings usually take on the quality of a party after the discussions are completed. The project itself is run by a small executive committee of volunteers chosen by the more than one thousand persons that pass through the groups each year. The project's relationship with the radio station is very informal. The station maintains control over the content of the broadcasts, but usually consults with members of the executive committee of "The Community Discussion Project" and sometimes broadcasts material prepared by volunteers in the project. "The Community Discussion Project" in Los Angeles indicates that participants will contribute financially and in other ways to a listening group project if they have a high degree of direct control over the organizational aspects.

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[15] Robert W. Hattery, Great Decisions—1962: A Survey of Kit Buyers in Two Wisconsin Communities (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Extension, 1964); and Jules J. Wanderer, Great Decisions 1961: Colorado Survey (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1961).

[16] FPA, A Joint Report on 'Great Decisions' in Boston (New York: FPA Office of Regional Operations, 1959), p. 2.

Other Recent Projects

The National Educational Television and Radio Center. In 1957 the Fund for Adult Education in conjunction with the National Educational Television and Radio Center worked out an agreement with the University of Georgia. The university arranged for the production of filmed series and accompanying reading materials which were telecast for home group discussion throughout Georgia and then made available for national distribution by the center. In 1960 the FAE granted the center $200,000 to set up a Department of Program Utilization. One of the department's first projects was the preparation of a series of films for national distribution to educational television stations on "Metropolis: Values in Conflict." A set of accompanying readings was prepared at UCLA and published in paperback by a commercial firm. Groups were formed in various cities to discuss the materials; one group was composed of the members of the city council of a southern California municipality. Sheats regards the project as quite successful and says that another is now being planned by the center on the problems of automation.

"Goals for the Region Project". The Regional Plan Association is a non-profit organization which attempts to provide land use and transportation system plans for the fifteen hundred governmental units in the three-state New York metropolitan area. In the spring of 1963, the association conducted a large listening group project called "The Goals for the Region Project"; the project was an attempt to involve large numbers of people in helping to react to tentative formulations of long-range plans for the New York metropolitan area on such topics as mass transit, density of housing, and recreational problems. A series of five television broadcasts was prepared, elaborate supplemental reading materials were printed, and questionnaires were designed so that the results could be tabulated and analyzed by scientific techniques. Each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire giving a number of opinions after each of the five discussions which followed the broadcasts. In one of the supplemental pamphlets the participants were informed that:

> This project differs from a simple poll of public opinion because the responses will be informed by as many important facts as can be set out briefly in these background booklets and the television shows. Your choices, then, can fall within the iron framework of reality rather than flying off to an unreachable utopia.[17]

Depending on the session, between 63 and 85 per cent of the questionnaires were returned to the sponsors. Altogether 5,600 persons participated in 680 listening groups. Freedman labeled this attendance "as large as any ever assembled for an adult education program, with an extraordinary number of groups watching a television series and reading specially prepared pamphlets."[18] Johnson called "The Goals for the Region Project" "one of the very best programs I've heard about."

"Human Encounter". A listening group experiment unique in terms of its purpose was conducted in 1964 by the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute at San Diego, California. The general purpose of the experiment was to find out if listening groups could contribute to community mental health. The institute believes that the chief mental health problem of the community "is not so much combating mental illness as it is dealing with the pervasive feelings of loneliness, alienation, frustration, generalized anxiety—the supposedly 'normal' feelings which beset us all."[19] Richard Farson, director of the institute, had become convinced through his research that what is known as the T-group, the diagnostic group, or the unstructured group in group dynamics parlance, could be just as effective in this context when self-directed or leaderless as when professionally directed. His research also demonstrated to his satisfaction that leaderless groups entailed no greater risks of negative effects than professionally led groups. Believing that the self-directed, unstructured group was a potential resource for community mental health, Farson persuaded a local San Diego commercial television station and the University of California Extension to cooperate with him in presenting a series of broadcasts for such groups. Twelve groups were formed on a random basis from persons who replied to an inquiry sent to the institute's mailing list. The groups met in homes where the host had agreed to act as the convener and not to try to assume the role of the leader. There was no leader trained or chosen for any group. Personal contact between the groups and the institute was kept at a bare minimum. The groups met for thirteen Sundays at noon to watch and discuss a one-half hour television series called "Human Encounter," composed of excerpts from video tapings of an unstructured group which was professionally led. The group seen on the broadcasts had been chosen from the same institute mailing list after careful screening. Each individual in the twelve listening groups was asked to fill out a diary of reactions after every broadcast and to send it to the institute for analysis. In the diary, the participants described experiences in the group and recorded incidents, if any, which had a positive or negative effect on them. The diaries, a unique form of feedback, were analyzed by volunteers at the institute (called "diary mothers") and summarized at weekly conferences of the institute staff.

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[17] William B. Shore, Letter to John Ohliger.

[18] Southern Regional Education Board, The Emerging City and Higher Education (Atlanta: SREB, 1963), pp. 13-14.

Farson concluded after the experiment that the plan used was feasible not only for twelve groups but for twelve thousand groups as well. He noted that more than half the groups were still meeting nine months after the experiment. Finally, he believed that the experiment confirmed the conclusion reached from previous studies at the institute that:

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[19] Richard E. Farson, "Self-Directed Groups and Community Mental Health," paper presented at meeting of American Psychological Association (Chicago, 1965), p. 1.

> The self-directed group is indeed an important new resource for community mental health—for bridging the emotional distance between people; for freeing people from the constrictions and superficialities of so much of our social interchange; for enabling people to experience the humanness of others, and through that experiencing to accept their own fundamental humanness.[20]

"Choice: Challenge for Modern Woman". Richard Farson was also one of over seventy persons who appeared as speakers or panelists on a twelve-program series broadcast over a Los Angeles educational television station in the fall of 1965. The series was presented as part of a listening group project developed by Mrs. Rosalind Loring, Coordinator of Programs for Women, University of California Extension. "Choice: Challenge for Modern Woman" was designed to give women in groups a meaningful opportunity to explore the question, "What is and should be the place of women in mid-twentieth-century America?" University of California Extension provided $50,000 for development, television production, and group organization costs. Two types of groups were organized. Women could pay a $7.50 fee to University Extension and enroll in a group meeting in the afternoon or evening under the direction of a trained lay leader. Participants in these groups received a copy of the syllabus, which summarized each broadcast, offered suggested questions for discussion, presented biographies of the speakers, and included a list of suggested readings. The second type of group was more informal. Mrs. Loring hired part-time organizers to encourage interested members or officers of women's organizations to form groups which might be led by anyone interested and would not require the payment of the $7.50 fee. Participants of these groups were encouraged but not required to purchase the syllabus at $2.00 each. Some of the leaders of these more informal groups received brief orientation in leadership techniques by paying $5.00 to enroll in a two-day course conducted by University Extension. In all, 180 groups with about 3,000 participants were organized. About 40 groups were composed of women paying fees to University Extension. The rest were informally organized and led.

In addition to the forms of organizing and financing groups, several other elements in the listening group approach received unique application. Regarding clients, 50 per cent of the women who participated had never enrolled in a University Extension program before. A number of groups were formed among racial minorities. Anecdotal evidence convinced Mrs. Loring that the educational and income level of the participants was significantly lower than for other extension activities. A new form of client participation in broadcast preparation resulted when representatives of women's organizations previewed and commented upon one of the proposed broadcasts. As a result of the comments received at the preview, the whole series was recast. Feedback in the form of written comments from each women's listening group was encouraged after each broadcast on forms provided in the syllabus. Excerpts and summaries of the feedback were reproduced in several newsletters which were sent back to the groups.

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[20] Ibid., p. 11.

As a result of the project, a number of the listening groups requested additional educational experiences from University Extension and other institutions. Some of the groups are still meeting on an informal basis. Sixty educational institutions, women's organizations, and television stations throughout the country have requested information on the project. The Department of Utilization of the National Educational Television and Radio Center has reproduced both the video tapes and the syllabus for national distribution through educational television stations. Typical of the many individual responses received by University Extension is a letter from Mrs. Esther Peterson, former Assistant United States Secretary of Labor. Mrs. Peterson termed the participation of three thousand southern California women in the project "tremendously heartening," and concluded, "The idea of building discussion sessions around the viewing of television broadcasts is an excellent one."[21]

"Rearing Children of Goodwill". For the past three years, the National Conference of Christians and Jews has been presenting four telecasts a year in a series designed for listening groups and called "Rearing Children of Goodwill." The purpose of the series is to help reduce prejudice and increase intergroup understanding among children through parent education. The broadcasts are presented on local television stations once a month in the spring. Mrs. Georgiana Hardy, a member of the Los Angeles Board of Education and the moderator of the 1966 series, commented recently to a newspaper interviewer, "You can't expect that people will be able to meet in discussion groups more often than once a month." Mrs. Hardy added, "It wouldn't be practical."[22] The series is geared to such organizations as the PTA, women's clubs, and church and temple groups. In Los Angeles, the series is presented monthly on Tuesdays at ten o'clock in the morning. The sponsors strongly encourage the organization of listening groups "in the belief that individuals watching will give greater thought to what they see if first they talk about it with their friends."[23] However, the sponsors have made no concerted organizing attempts and provide no supplemental reading materials other than an occasional book list sent upon request. The National Conference of Christians and Jews has no idea how many listening groups have been organized to watch and discuss "Rearing Children of Goodwill."

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[21] Rosalind Loring, Interview with John Ohliger.

GROUPS IN OTHER AREAS

West Indies

Houle writes that the Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the University College of the West Indies "has been a pioneer in the imaginative use of radio." Peers gives this picture of one of the department's radio activities:

> An interesting development, designed to meet the needs of a scattered population, has been the organization of CITIZEN'S LISTENING POSTS in Jamaica. Groups of listeners meet each week to follow a course of broadcast talks, the department providing syllabuses, guides to reading, background material and suggestions for discussion. The groups send in reports and submit questions which are dealt with in subsequent broadcast talks. The two main objectives which seem to emerge are, first, the creation of a new pride of citizenship in an area in which hitherto a sense of tradition has been lacking, and secondly, training of leaders in preparation for self-government in a period of rapid social change.[24]

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[22] The Los Angeles Times (March 11, 1966), p. 16.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Robert Peers (ed.), Adult Education: A Comparative Study (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), pp. 324-25.

Great Britain

There has been a modest group viewing movement in Great Britain at least since the mid-1950's. Cassirer reports that a women's organization, the Townswomen's Guild, has encouraged its members "to view certain broadcasts at home and to discuss them later at a regular guild meeting." In 1956, a British National Advisory Committee on Television Group Viewing was formed. Though the BBC does not participate actively as it did before the Second World War, it does cooperate by providing advance information on some of its broadcasts. The committee has published pamphlets on organizing listening groups, arranged for demonstrations, and scheduled training courses for organizers. However, Joseph Trenaman, a researcher in television at the University of Leeds has stated that, despite the activity of the committee, television "is so closely identified as a source of home information and relaxation that it is difficult to see how group viewing could ever develop on a very large scale."[25]

Western Europe

A British adult education publication reported in 1956 that television group viewing projects had been established in Switzerland, Belgium, and Holland.

Scandinavia

An American adult education publication stated in 1954 that, continuing the pre-Second World War tradition, study circles in Scandinavia often discuss programs broadcast by radio.

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[25] Joseph Trenaman, "The Responsibilities of the Receiver," Adult Education (London), 32 (Spring 1960), p. 249.

Chapter IV

OVERVIEW: RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF RELATED STUDIES

On Purposes and Outcomes

Directly applicable research on the listening group is sparse but it is increasing. The attempts by researchers to measure outcomes of various United States listening group projects up to the Second World War seem to be marked by a difference between items the researchers measured and the outcomes the sponsors sought.

Take the first study that was conducted, for instance. From 1927 to 1934, the League of Women Voters presented a series of broadcasts for listening groups called "Voters' Service," designed to arouse the interest of the groups' participants in political issues and to help clarify their thinking by increasing their ability to criticize proposals of all types.

In 1932 the league arranged with a psychologist, Edward S. Robinson of Yale's Institute of Human Relations, to prepare questionnaires to measure the effect of a sub-series of four broadcasts on ninety-one listening groups scattered throughout the country. The four broadcasts were on the very timely topic of unemployment. Robinson prepared the questionnaires and had them administered to the members of the groups as individuals before the first broadcast and after the fourth. The questionnaire asked each member to state in his own words his solutions for unemployment and then to estimate the truth or falsity of a number of published statements about the problem.

Instead of seeking to measure change in interest, Robinson was measuring awareness of ideas expressed on the broadcasts by counting the new suggestions in the first part of the questionnaire. Instead of measuring increased ability to think critically, he was measuring change of opinion in the first portion of the test. Robinson did find that awareness increased significantly when compared with a control group that did not listen to the broadcasts. But he was most impressed himself with the fact that opinions did not change significantly, that instead popular opinions came to be held more consistently. Robinson did not attempt to set up a control group which listened to but did not discuss the content of the four broadcasts, despite the fact that the league said it believed that:

> In group listening what we are really studying is the effect of the talk plus social influence and group discussion and the general heightening of interest through the mere presence of companions.[1]

From the mid-1930's until the United States entered the Second World War, a number of studies were made of the effects of the popular NBC series "America's Town Meeting of the Air." The first of these "Town Meeting" studies was conducted in the spring of 1936 in the New York City high schools in conjunction with the New York Society for the Experimental Study of Education. Forty students from as many high schools visited the studios in New York when six broadcasts were presented. These forty students then returned to their classes the next day and led discussions among other students who had listened to the programs in their homes. Before each broadcast, and one week after, all the students answered yes, no, or doubtful to a series of questions appropriate to the topic and calling for conclusive opinions on issues (e.g., "Do you approve of military training in public educational institutions?").

This study, like that of "Voters' Service," shows some disparity between the goals of the project and outcomes which the researchers attempted to measure. The high schools were participating in the project in order to help "make students critical toward what they hear on the radio regarding public affairs." The tests measured change of opinions. One announced result was that "29.3 per cent of those participating changed their attitudes toward the economic and social problems discussed during the six weeks of the project."[2]

Later in 1936, Cantril at Princeton attempted to measure change of opinion as a result of the "Town Meeting" programs by studying letters sent to Denny and by surveying some of the studio audiences. As it was reported with acclaim in the popular press, Cantril discovered that 34 per cent of the listeners changed their opinions as a result of the broadcasts. But changing opinions was not the goal of the program; promoting discussion and intelligent interest was the prime goal. Cantril also showed that 28 per cent of the listeners and studio audiences invariably followed the broadcast with further discussion, that 50 per cent usually did, and that 20 per cent sometimes did. These conclusions were a factor in encouraging Denny to set up a system for providing supplementary discussion materials and suggestions to listening groups a year later.[3]

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[1] Josephine H. MacLatchy (ed.), Education on the Air: Third Yearbook of the Institute for Education by Radio (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1932), pp. 211-20.

[2] Michael Levine, "The New York City High School Radio Experiment," in National Council for Social Studies Seventh Yearbook (New York: NCSS, 1937), pp. 165-70.

Two additional experiments which, like the 1936 New York City high school study, dealt with the value of "Town Meeting," were conducted in 1940 under the auspices of Ohio State University and the University of Southern California. Again both studies placed greatest emphasis on discovering changes in specific attitudes or opinions among the students. In these extensive experiments, which involved high schools throughout the country, the resulting changes were not found to be statistically significant. Here again the studies indicated as an incidental conclusion that interest in current topics on the part of students following listening and discussion of the broadcasts increased markedly.

The most sophisticated early work on the listening groups attached to "Town Meeting" or on the listening groups in general was conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld or received his assistance or advice. In an early study, Lazarsfeld used the panel technique of interviewing the same group of respondents several times to get data on the general influence of "Town Meeting." By "influence" Lazarsfeld said he meant increased awareness, increased knowledge, and opinion change. Following a study of the panel after three broadcasts, he found statistically significant evidence that women listeners were more influenced than men, and that persons without a college education were more influenced than college graduates.[4]

Lazarsfeld also made a number of remarks about listening groups in general in his major work, Radio and the Printed Page. In the book he offered this prediction about the general value of listening groups to radio stations:

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[3] C. S. Marsh (ed.), Educational Broadcasting 1936 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), pp. 333-34.

[4] Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "'Panel' Studies," Public Opinion Quarterly, 4 (March, 1940), p. 125.

> If our analysis of facilitating factors is correct, listening groups should be more successful where they tie in with ideological movements. It is true that the general broadcaster can scarcely provide special programs for every special-interest group to the extent that a labor or Christian Science station can. But many problems, as we have seen, are interesting for such groups merely as an object of scrutiny and debate. By educating these organizations systematically toward such use of radio, audiences can be substantially enlarged. . . .
>
> The most important function of [listening groups] may be that they acquaint individuals with serious programs.[5]

Lazarsfeld also indicated that on the basis of preliminary studies he believed that listening groups were in general short-lived. However, Hill's broad study of listening groups in the United States found that at least half of the groups studied claimed a life of more than two years.

With the introduction of the two-step theory of mass communications effects, however, direct concern with measuring the stated purposes of listening groups increased. The period between the pre-Second World War studies and those after the war is marked by the development of a new explanation of how the mass communication process works. Katz notes that before the publication of the Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet study in 1948, The People's Choice, most researchers saw the mass media as working directly on "the atomized mass audience, connected to the mass media but not to each other."[6] After the publication of this work, which posited "the two-step theory of mass communications" (i.e., that the mass media affect "opinion leaders," who pass the effect on in interpersonal relations with others), researchers for the first time became interested in the relation between the mass media and the interpersonal forces that occur in a group setting.

Research studies have pointed to the possibilities that listening groups facilitate factual learning through the discussion which involves the principle of participation, that some listening groups foster attitude change, and that some listening groups increase the ability of participants to think critically.

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[5] Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Radio and the Printed Page (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1940), p. 127.

[6] Elihu Katz, "Interpersonal Relations and Mass Communications: Studies in the Flow of Influence" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1956), p. 10.

A number of experiments have utilized the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal in conjunction with broadcasts and with discusssions. Crawford found, for example, that critical thinking, as measured by the Watson-Glaser test, decreased after exposure to broadcasts unaccompanied by discussion. Crawford recommended the fostering of verbal exchanges following broadcasts to counteract this effect.[7] Hadlock, in an experiment at UCLA, discovered that discussion which followed exposure to reading materials presenting clashing views on political questions did result in a statistically significant increase in scores on the Watson-Glaser test.[8]

Some recent Japanese experiments with high school students listening to one-sided radio broadcasts on moral issues showed that the group which discussed the issues after the broadcasts developed a much more critical attitude toward the viewpoint of the broadcasts than did the group which merely listened and did not discuss.

Six recently published research studies by UNESCO indicate the value of projects sponsored by that organization in promoting attitude change and stimulating action of a community development type. The first publication, appearing under UNESCO auspices in 1954, studied the approach of the "Canadian Farm Radio Forum." Unlike the other studies, it did not contain a quantifiable or replicable study of the groups, but presented a general sociological view of the Canadian project on a theoretical and descriptive level.[9] Four more of the publications provide detailed information on projects which UNESCO sponsored and helped finance in India, France, and Japan.[10]

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[7] C. Delisle Crawford, "Critical Thinking and Personal Values in a Listening Situation" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1956), pp. 78-79.

[8] Alton Parker Hadlock, "A Study of the Development of Critical Thinking Through Adult Discussion Groups" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1958), p. 74.

[9] R. Alex Sim, Canada's Farm Radio Forum (Paris: UNESCO, 1954).

[10] Joffre Dumazedier, Television and Rural Adult Education: The Tele-Clubs in France (Paris: UNESCO, 1956); J. C. Mathur and Paul Neurath, An Indian Experiment in Farm Radio Forums (Paris: UNESCO,

Two of the studies on India indicate the great success of these projects in stimulating action on a local level. The first, An Indian Experiment in Farm Radio Forums, includes an evaluative study of the rural radio project which was carried out in India by Paul Neurath, Professor of Statistics and Social Research at Queens College, New York. Neurath handled the evaluation while a Fulbright Fellow with the Tata Institute of Social Studies in Bombay. Of all the UNESCO studies, his is the most reliable, partly because it was carried out by an organization which was independent of the sponsors and partly because it utilized control groups. Similar conditions applied to a later and more modest study on the use of television with urban groups in New Delhi, Social Education Through Television.

In France, those evaluating the rural television groups were also involved in organizing the groups and training the leaders. The evaluation suffered because of this involvement. Also, no control groups were set up. Similar problems hampered the Japanese study, published in 1960.

The last of the six major studies by UNESCO was written by Wilbur Schramm and published in 1964.[11] Mass Media and National Development summarizes the work of UNESCO's Educational Use of Mass Media Division, which was responsible for promoting the listening group projects. It concludes that the UNESCO listening group projects effectively demonstrate "the uniquely powerful combination of mass media and related group discussion."

On Clients

Other direct and related studies provide material on the value of listening groups in urban areas and on the possibility that some persons profit more from participation in listening groups than others.

Most of the research on recent listening groups has centered on projects in underdeveloped rural areas. There is a belief among some

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1959); J. C. Mathur and H. P. Saksena, Social Education Through Television (Paris: UNESCO, 1963); and UNESCO, Rural Television in Japan (Paris: UNESCO, 1960).

[11] Wilbur Schramm, Mass Media and National Development (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964).

that these are the only areas that really profit from such projects. Solomon Inquai's doctoral dissertation, based on an investigation of several projects, concluded:

> In the economically advanced countries and in urban areas, group listening has not proved to be very successful. There is, in fact, a decline in group listening with increased economic well being.[12]

However, there have been a number of apparently successful projects in urban areas. UNESCO has sponsored one in New Delhi, India and one in San Juan, Puerto Rico, which it regarded as worthwhile. Canada conducted a moderately effective program in its urban areas for several years called "Citizens' Forum" (see Chapter III). In the United States, the Foreign Policy Association's "Great Decisions" programs have utilized radio and television in several cities (see Chapter III). A few of the FPA projects have been evaluated in surveys and research studies which provide a wealth of data on the members of the groups. The best known urban experiments in this country were conducted in San Bernardino and St. Louis by Eugene Johnson (see Chapter III). Johnson has written lengthy descriptive accounts of both of these projects, but no readily available research in replicable form exists.

There is some related research which points to the possibility that persons of certain personality types or with certain attitude structures might benefit more from participation in listening groups than others. Though most listening groups are voluntary projects to which anyone interested is welcomed, there are several which, though voluntary, are not self-selecting. The Indian groups, for instance, are formed on the basis of invitations sent out by the district organizer after consultation with local village leaders. If personality were a factor, such information might be of value to organizers of groups selecting the clients.

On Types of Broadcasts

Preferred types of broadcasts as well as their specific contents depend to a great extent on the purpose of the project. Riley and Riley concluded on the basis of an examination of several related studies that it is more effective to present broadcasts which carry explicit conclusions than those which stimulate the audience to draw its own conclusions.[13]

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[12] Solomon Inquai, "The Application of Radio in Community Education in Ethiopia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1963), p. 129.

A number of descriptive studies of listening group projects indicate that participants prefer to have a variety of types of broadcasts presented to them. There is some possibility that, based on a related experiment by Erickson, the most preferred and effective type for facilitating factual learning might be one which utilizes the dramatic form—a play or a scene.[14]

There is an overwhelming distaste on the part of the producers and listening group participants alike for the broadcast that features a single straight talk delivered by an expert. However, a research psychologist at the Columbia Broadcasting System and a one-time CBS education director have done some research which indicates the possibility that it isn't the straight talk that is distasteful, but the way in which the expert presents it. Hudson and Weibe argue that there is no one more effective on radio and television than the commercial announcer who speaks directly to the individual members of the audience in order to sell merchandise. These two gentlemen believe the participation of the listener would be engaged if the expert would adopt the direct informal approach of the commercial announcer.[15]

Allen has suggested a conclusion about the value of repeating broadcasts. He believes that Australian research indicates the repetition of a film after a delay following discussion is probably one of the most effective methods devised.[16] No examples of the method have been discovered in the listening groups so far. However, in the San Bernardino and St. Louis experiments, broadcasters would frequently return to the air after the discussion to explore the same subject further.

Lazarsfeld's survey of listeners to the "Town Meeting of the Air" brings up a suggestion for a specific broadcast type. The listeners surveyed by Lazarsfeld indicated they preferred speakers with whom they had some prior contact, through having read their newspaper columns or books, or having at least heard of them.[17]

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[13] Matilda White Riley and John W. Riley, Jr., "Mass Communication and the Social System," in Robert K. Merton et al., Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 540.

[14] Elmer Julius Erickson, "A Critical Analysis of Three Types of Radio Listening" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1942), pp. 239-40.

[15] Robert Hudson and Gerhart D. Wiebe, "A Case for Listener Participation," Public Opinion Quarterly, 12 (Summer 1948), p. 207.

[16] William H. Allen, "Research on Film Use: Student Participation," Audio-Visual Communication Review, 5 (Spring 1957), p. 51.

On Supplemental Printed Materials

The use of printed or visual materials when added to the broadcast and the discussion results in the multi-media approach, which Klapper believes possesses "certain distinct advantages." Klapper's first survey of research on the effects of the mass media concluded that the multimedia approach which includes small group discussion adds significantly to the effects "in intensity of appeal, in offering real and immediate rewards, and in conferring peculiarly high status upon both the media spokesman and his audience."[18]

Lazarsfeld reports on a survey of the leaders of listening groups attached to the "Town Meeting of the Air" in regard to their preferences for various types of supplemental printed materials available from the broadcast originators. The leaders rated as "very valuable" that material which gave background information on the speakers and the issues. Lazarsfeld concluded that the leaders felt that "the best help they can get is background material in advance of the broadcast; in other words, a frame of reference."[19]

Lowdermilk conducted an extensive and carefully prepared experiment on the relation between reading materials and radio broadcasts in public high schools which offers some possible applications to research on adult listening groups. Lowdermilk concludes that supplemental printed materials would have more impact if studied after the broadcast and discussion instead of before, as is usually the case; that a script of the broadcast sent to the groups should be read by each participant as the radio broadcast is heard, thus potentially increasing the effectiveness; and that the use of printed materials instead of mimeographed ones "results in greater attitude intensification."[20]

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[17] Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 111.

[18] Joseph T. Klapper, "The Effects of Mass Media" (New York: Columbia University, 1949), mimeographed, pp. 52-54.

[19] Lazarsfeld, op. cit., pp. 111-12.

[20] Ronald R. Lowdermilk, "Attitude Shifts from Reading and from

On Methods of Group Organization

Lazarsfeld's and Merton's study of the use of listening groups by Coughlin, Hitler, and Stalin convinced them of the importance of careful organization of groups. They qualify this conclusion with the statement that the impact of the broadcast itself "lessens the task of the local organizer, and the personnel requirements for such subalterns need not be as rigorous in a popular movement."[21]

A research psychologist at the Columbia Broadcasting System notes that broadcasts may actually impel listeners to want to join in an activity such as a listening group, but that what he calls an "implementing social mechanism" must be easily available.[22] The CBS psychologist believes that if too much effort is required on the part of the listener at the beginning, activity will simply not get organized on a sustaining basis.

The integrative trend in mass communications studies is affecting the study of the listening group. The study of the listening group represents an instance of the new belief that mass media effects are meaningless in most contexts if they are viewed through a simple piecemeal stimulus-response model rather than as integrated wholes. The focus is shifting to the whole system and moving away from concentration on the so-called "media." This trend is observable in a number of areas.

The educational broadcaster speaks of the need to integrate the products of educational television with the activities of the listeners, to get listeners discussing and acting on the programs' content.

Schramm writes of "the concept of system" replacing talk of "media" in developing countries. He states:

> It is recognized that the great battles of development are continuing ones, and the results come less from the impact of single messages or single media than from a succession of impacts of re-

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Radio-Program Listening" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1939), pp. 139-40, 148.

[21] Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Tastes, and Organized Social Action," in Lyman Bryson (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas* (New York: Cooper Square Pub. Inc., 1948), p. 116.

[22] R. Alex Sim, *A Radio Forum Project for the Canadian North* (Toronto: Indian-Eskimo Association, 1965), pp. 681-85.

> lated messages and reinforcing channels. Campaigns to modernize some part of a society will almost invariably make use of face-to-face communication as well as the media. Whenever possible, they will use more than one mass media channel to an audience. As the campaign goes on, the nature of the messages will change, and they will require different channels or combinations of channels.[23]

Cassirer speaks officially for UNESCO when he states that the organization's experiences since its founding have resulted in the conclusion that "the use of the broadcast medium is a total process of which the production of programs is merely one part." Cassirer adds that "equal attention must be given to the form of reception, to the utilization of programs, to providing related literature and discussion guides and to incorporating into programs the feedback-reaction from the audience."[24]

This integrative approach to the combination of mass media and small groups may undergo a new shift in emphasis through Kurt Back's proposed research, which centers on the situation in which the products of the mass media are received. Back, a Duke University Professor of Sociology and Psychiatry, has proposed a lengthy and expensive research project combining survey and experiment, using the research process itself as one of the experimental variables. His proposal was recently published as one of eighteen prize-winning plans for "breakthrough" research in the behavioral approach to mass communication studies.[25] The judges for the competition included Klapper, Lazarsfeld, and Schramm.

Back concentrates on the setting for the reception of communication, which he believes is "the crucial point for understanding the impact of the mass media." In his preliminary theoretical work he has defined two situational variables—prominence of the communication and audience structure—and has developed several hypotheses relating these variables to impact.

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23. Wilbur Schramm, Mass Media and National Development (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 145.

24. Henry Cassirer, "Television and Fundamental Education," Fundamental and Adult Education, IX (1957), p. 345.

25. Kurt W. Back, "Prominence and Audience Structure: The Linkage Between Mass Media and Interpersonal Communication," in Leon Arons and Mark A. May, Television and Human Behavior: Tomorrow's Research in Mass Communication (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).

Back defines prominence as a function of the amount of control which the communicator has over the time and place of exposure. By audience structure he means the social relations among the members of the audience. The table on page 74 illustrates Back's model of these two variables. Note the position of "group discussion."

Among the hypotheses he sets up for testing is this one, which forms the base for his proposed research:

> The immediate impact of mass communication is stronger the greater the prominence of the communication in the reception situation, and will remain stronger the greater the opportunity for further discussion in social conditions analogous to the original audience structure.[26]

When Back's comments about the importance of small interacting groups and his speculation that "the impact of mass media may also be furthered if the [audience] situation is attuned to the kind of communication" are combined with the basic hypothesis mentioned above, it becomes clear how important his proposed research would be for establishing the role of listening groups within the totality of the mass communications, social, political, and educational institutions.

If his research were carried out in an area with a significant number of listening groups, a wealth of answers to many of the research questions posed here might be forthcoming. For the first time the precise ways in which listening groups operate might begin to emerge.

ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS

In Purpose

The purposes for which listening group projects have been organized in more than thirty countries over the last forty-five years may fruitfully be arranged on a continuum. At one end would be grouped those projects which emphasize specific dissemination to the participants and might be called "specific dissemination." At the other end of the continuum would be those projects which place a priority on the general growth of the participants and might be labeled "general growth." Of course every project falls somewhere on the continuum and not at the extreme ends, because all use some part of each purpose.

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[26] Ibid., p. 19.

ILLUSTRATIVE POSITIONS OF COMMUNICATION SITUATION IN A PROMINENCE-AUDIENCE STRUCTURE CLASSIFICATION

AUDIENCE STRUCTURE	PROMINENCE		
	High (Time and Place Communicator Selected)	Medium (Time Communicator Selected)	Low (Neither Time nor Place Communicator Selected)
Mass	Theater Movie Theater-TV	Circus and other loosely organized rallies	TV in bars, etc.
Small Groups	TV (special events) Group discussions	Night-club acts Family TV Phonograph Party-talk	TV as background Radio
Individual	Books Interview Individual discussion	TV Phonograph Magazines	Car radio Newspaper
	(The only relevant stimulus in the situation)	(The central stimulus against a distracting background)	(The background for other activities)

Projects aimed at specific dissemination include those which attempt to impart factual information, broadcast a single point of view, encourage reaching a predetermined conclusion, encourage local action projects, or change specific attitudes or opinions of the participants. Such projects include the UNESCO-sponsored groups in underdeveloped countries and the activities in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and the Soviet Union before the Second World War.

Projects aimed at general growth include those which try to emphasize issues, encourage dissent, broadcast clashing views, encourage reaching decisions but not necessarily consensus, help participants to affect national policies, or change general attitudes or approaches of the participants. Emphasis on this type of purpose is found in the Canadian groups, some of the Scandinavian groups, and the groups organized or encouraged by Eugene Johnson in the United States.

In Clients

An important variable in the selection of clients is specificity of focus. The range here extends from projects that attempt to appeal to the general adult population of a nation without restrictions, through projects that try to reach a large but specific portion of the nation such as the adult rural population, through projects that aim at specific target groups such as unemployed persons or church groups, to projects that place some restrictions upon selecting individuals joining each listening group such as some of the groups in India. The trend seems to be toward greater specificity in selecting the target clients, but there is a great need for research which might indicate the different ways that different types of client groups might react to involvement. The projects fostered or studied by UNESCO, Eugene Johnson, and University of California Extension indicate that listening groups appeal to clients not ordinarily attracted to adult education offerings, such as groups with lower economic and educational attainments than is typical.

In Types of Broadcasts

There are few trends discernible or generalizations possible in the area of the broadcasts to listening groups. One trend is that toward a greater variety of types of broadcasts used, another is greater encouragement of client participation in broadcast preparation. A continuing controversy in this area has been the question of the appropriateness of television as a medium for the broadcasts. Some commentators feel that the advent of television has had a harmful effect on projects already utilizing radio. Others point to the successful listening groups which started on television. Further research might indicate that whatever problems there are lie in the transition from radio to television of a project that started on radio.

In Supplemental Printed Materials

The trend has certainly been toward greater emphasis on the preparation and distribution of supplemental printed materials. The recent projects which have placed the highest importance on the use of these materials are generally the ones that have been rated the most successful by outside observers.

In Methods of Group Organization

A definite conclusion has developed in regard to this listening group element. Johnson, Schramm, Kidd, and several others are in agreement about the need for enough paid organizers working continually in the field to set up the groups, service them, and maintain them. Williams has stated, "The success or failure of group listening everywhere depends primarily upon the stability and efficiency of the organizing machinery."[27]

In Methods of Post-Broadcast Discussions

Though there has been a great deal of research on discussion groups in general, little or none of it has been directed toward an examination of discussion by listening groups. From this study of various listening group projects, at least four patterns have emerged. First, there is the discussion that aims only at getting an examination of the topic by as many individuals in the group as possible and is not structured toward reaching any conclusions; the projects emphasizing study and an increase in thinking ability fit here. Second, there is the discussion which encourages the participants to reach conclusions as individuals but not necessarily submit them to group scrutiny; the projects which encourage participants to fill out and submit what are in effect secret ballots utilize this pattern. Third, there is the discussion which aims at encouraging a group decision on a problem, an issue, or a question, but does not tie that group decision in with any commitment to individual or group action; some of Johnson's later projects in St. Louis utilized this pattern. Fourth, there is the discussion which moves not only toward a group decision but is structured to encourage a commitment to individual or group action upon that decision; the UNESCO-sponsored groups are the best examples of projects that promote this type of discussion. Some commentators feel that only one of these patterns is productive of successful, sustained listening group projects. Cassirer of UNESCO, for example, has made such statements about the fourth type of discussion pattern.

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[27] Frank Ernest Hill and W. E. Williams, Radio's Listening Groups: The United States and Great Britain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 240.

In Group Leadership Arrangements

There is a discernible trend through the history of listening group projects on the question of the importance and qualifications of the leader. Earlier projects placed great emphasis upon choosing leaders who either were subject matter experts or had received some training in the process of leading discussions or both. More recent projects place more emphasis on structuring the whole project so that trained leaders are not crucial to the success of the group. The extreme example of this trend is the work of Farson in developing leaderless listening groups. The trend is evident too in the type of argument that has appeared on the subject of leadership in the literature. Forty years ago, adult educators in England were arguing about whether the leader needed to be a subject matter expert on the level of a university tutor or could be a person with less education but more tact and diplomacy in working with a group. Now adult educators in India disagree over whether the leader needs to be able to read or write or can perform his tasks well even though illiterate.

In Feedback Procedures

There has been a definite trend in recent years toward greater and greater emphasis on the use of feedback procedures. Since the Canadian project made feedback a basic and integral part of each group's experience, the tendency has been to provide more and more opportunities for two-way communication. Recent research in the area of mass communication about the value of two-way communication and the intergroup reactions involved in the mass media approach have encouraged even more the adoption of this element. There are now a wide variety of different feedback procedures available to the sponsor of a listening group project.

ENVOI

It is very possible that the major obstacle to greater use of the listening group as a program form does not lie in any inherent limitations in the approach itself, but in the institutional milieu in which it must operate. The listening group in operation cuts across the institutional lines that have developed in most advanced societies. It must combine the talents, interests, and finances of men and power structures in educational as well as mass media institutions to a much greater degree than general educational broadcasting. It may be significant that in recent years listening group projects seem to have been more successful in countries where, because they are in earlier stages of development, the institutional lines are not so firmly drawn. The difficulties in maintaining and building cooperative working relationships between adult educators and broadcasters in Great Britain and Canada provide further instances of this problem of institutional melding. As Hilton Power of the Foreign Policy Association recently pointed out:

> When you have two agencies cooperating—educational institutions and the mass media—in a common endeavor, the project itself is not always of sufficient concern to either party for them to be able to sustain the idea for very long. Each has a fear of the other party determining its objectives.[28]

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[28] Hilton Power, Letter to John Ohliger.

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